

The Roman Catholic Church in the History of the Polish Exiled Community in Great Britain

JÓZEF GULA

**School of Slavonic and East European Studies
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DEDICATION

*to the Polish Catholic Mission in London
on its approach to the one hundredth anniversary (1994)
of its existence,
in recognition of its work in times of peace and war
and to the late Mgr Władysław Staniszewski,
its longest serving rector and a man of great faith.*



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FOREWORD

The creation of a Polish community in Great Britain resulted from wartime experiences which few people in the West could have imagined — occupation by both Nazis and Soviets, genocide, deportations, ethnic cleansing, slave labour, the exotic odysseys of homeless and stateless refugees. It was, above all, a moral triumph, a victory of faith and determination over adversities of an extreme kind. The role of the Catholic Church was crucial, not only in the close cultural link between Polishness and Catholicism, but also in the self-denying devotion of priests and chaplains, who accompanied their flock in all stages of their ordeal.

Dr Gula's study, therefore, raises the discussion of migration and exile above the more familiar political, social and economic concerns. It explores the sources of a community's identity and of its will to survive. In this, it renders a valuable service both to Polish history and to the history of migrants and refugees in general.

Norman Davies

Norman Davies, FRHistS, Professor
17 April 1993

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Among the many theses and books concerning Polish questions which have appeared in the West recently, there are none which have attempted to analyse the religious life of Poles abroad. This fact has been one of the main reasons for writing this book. The other is the approach of the one hundredth anniversary of the Polish Catholic Mission in London, which formed a focal point in the religious life of Polish exiles.

My view that such a work was needed has been met with encouragement, for which I am sincerely grateful.

I wish to offer my thanks to Professor Jerzy Zubrzycki in Canberra and Dr Keith Sword (London).

I would like to express my particular gratitude to Professor Norman Davies, under whose supervision the thesis which became this book was written. His deep knowledge of Polish problems, including the problems of Poles in exile, together with his eye for detail and his guidance, were invaluable in enabling me to finish this work.

My special thanks go to Andrzej Pomian for his kind words of encouragement and to Maria Pomian for the long hours spent patiently correcting the text and for her occasional advice on expressing my thoughts in English, which is not my native language.

The M.B. Grabowski Fund, whose purpose is to assist in spreading the appreciation of Polish culture in Great Britain, must be thanked for its financial support in the final preparation and editing of this text.

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INTRODUCTION

The subject of this study is the role of religion in the history of the exiled Polish community, which made its way to Britain in the years 1939 to 1950. The role of religion in the life of man has been stressed by sociologists as well as by theologians and religious leaders. Religion 'is not a sort of luxury which a man could go along without, but a condition of his very existence. He could not be a man, if he had not acquired it.'¹

This volume will give an account of the role and influence of the Roman Catholic faith in the life of the Polish exiles and their communities in the decade following the outbreak of the Second World War. It will trace their lives during the war and immediately after, in various European countries, though mainly in Britain, as also in the Soviet Union and the Middle East. All these countries were, for a certain time, places of short-term residence for the Poles, whose war ally and the last refuge after the war became Great Britain. A substantial chapter has been added, outlining the history of Poles in Britain before 1939, and the general question of their national identity. It would be useful to note that the exiled Poles, wherever they were, saw themselves as the Polish nation abroad. The reason, perhaps, was that the communities included persons of all ages, sexes, classes and professions who were thus able to form and develop their own cultural, religious and political life.

Religion helped the Poles to transcend their painful history and see clearly the meaning of human existence and their place in the universe and on earth.

One term still demands some explanation, namely the use of the word 'exile'. By this one understands: Polish political or ideological emigrants, the majority of whom were soldiers and refugees from Nazi and Soviet terror. The word 'exile' has a very deep biblical meaning. Emigrants of the nineteenth century from an annihilated country used this expression as an honourable indication of their origin.

The Poles who settled in Great Britain after the long fight 'For our freedom and yours'² definitely deserve the same title.

NOTE

The reader of this study may be surprised to find that a number of different figures are offered for the number of Polish soldiers imprisoned by the Soviets after 17 September 1939. These are:

-180,000 (according to J. Coutouvidis & J.Reynolds, *Poland 1939-1947*, p. 60).

-200,000 (as stated by J. Garliński, *Poland in the Second World War*, p. 25; A. Liebich, *Na obcej ziemi*, p. 58 — Woroshylow's report).

-230,000 (according to Z. S. Siemaszko, *W Sowietkim osaczeniu*, p. 54).

¹ E. Durkheim, 'The Social Foundation of Religion', *Sociology of Religion*, Harmondsworth, 1984, p. 53.

² J. Zubrzycki, *Polish Immigrants in Britain*, The Hague, 1956, p. 120.

- 46,000 (handed over to Germans or released home. Ibid., p. 54).
- 210,000 (pressed into service in the Red Army — Liebich, p. 58).
- 500,000 (Gen. W. Anders' report — J. Siedlecki, *Losy Polaków w ZSRR w latach 1939-1986*, p. 40).

The discrepancies in the sources referred to above may be explained as follows:

- 180,000 soldiers does not include those who escaped to Lithuania or Latvia, to be interned there.
- 200,000, which is extended to 230,000 includes those in Lithuania, Latvia and escapees.
- 300,000 includes the 46,000 soldiers handed over to the Germans or released home.
- 500,000 — Gen. W. Anders includes in this number those pressed into service in the Red Army.

TO SUMMARIZE: 180,000 (East Poland) + 50000 (Lithuania, Latvia and escapees) + 46,000 (handed to Germans or released) + 210,000 pressed into the Soviet Army = about 500,000 (Gen.Anders's estimate).

CHAPTER ONE

Polish Exiles in Nineteenth-Century Britain

Sent by a Storm

More than one hundred years before the Second World War and the arrival of the first units of the Polish Armed Forces in Britain (September 1939), a severe storm brought two ships from Prussia to the British ports of Portsmouth and Harwich. The ships had been on their way to America, loaded with passengers of Polish origin. The Prussian Government had decided to deport to America men who had crossed the Prussian border, while escaping after the defeat of the 1830 Polish Insurrection against tsarist rule. Before embarking on the *Union* and the *Marianne* they spent some time in Prussian prisons, condemned to hard labour.

The *Marianne* arrived at Deal (near Dover) on 29 December 1833, and, on 5 January 1834, it reached Portsmouth. The *Union* berthed in Harwich the same day. Passengers from both ships mutinied and refused to travel to America. The Poles from the *Union* decided to enlist in the French army serving in Algiers and 233 of them soon left Britain, while, on the other hand, the 212 Poles from the *Marianne*, after lengthy negotiations with the local authorities and using many shrewd tricks and even force in their arguments with the crew and the Captain of the *Marianne*, made their way ashore on 14 February 1834 and eventually settled in Great Britain.¹ Living in safety in the British Isles, they had time to reflect on the two years of hard labour in Prussian forts² and the year spent fighting another enemy, namely the Russians.³

To understand the reasons leading to the 1830 Insurrection we can turn to the account of a contemporary visitor called Harro Harring.⁴

¹ Peter Brock, *Geneza ludu polskiego w Anglii*, London, 1962, pp. 39, 40, 41, 56, 58.

² *Ibid.*, p. 54.

³ Sławomir Kalemka, *Wielka Emigracja*, Warsaw, 1971 (hereafter *Wielka Emigracja*), pp. 5-22.

⁴ Harro Harring, *Poland Under the Dominion of Russia*, London, 1831 (hereafter *Poland Under Russia*).

The 'Chains of Slavery'

Poland was partitioned by three powers: Austria, Prussia and Russia. The western part of Russian Poland — the Kingdom of Poland — had a special status, devised at the Congress of Vienna, and retained certain autonomous institutions: an elected Diet, the Napoleonic Code, its own administration, treasury and army.⁵ Independence was solemnly promised by the Tsar. But the Tsar, to whose Empire the eastern part of Poland had been simply annexed, had absolute power in his hands and he was the sole interpreter of his own promises. Alexander I, widely regarded as a 'liberal' outside Russia:

... did not hesitate to withhold publication of the budget, to annul the election of troublesome deputies, or to suspend the Diet by decree.

Under Nicholas I, who succeeded in 1825, the mask was cast aside. Nicholas I, an arch-autocrat by temper and intent, had no stomach for his role as constitutional king of Poland ...

His arbitrary interventions in the running of the Kingdom's police, army, and courts indicated the new priorities, whilst the wholesale arrests and vindictive prosecutions undertaken by his 'Third Section' mocked the Kingdom's constitution.⁶

Harring's account makes fascinating reading for somebody learning about life under Russian rule in the Congress Kingdom:

Poland was then a constitutional monarchy and had a charter, yet the Poles submitted for fifteen years, preceding the 29th November, 1830, to the humiliation of being oppressed by the cruellest caprice that any people ever endured! ⁷

He noticed how different it was to the situation in free countries:

The Pole appears in the character of a substantial husbandman who is not allowed to walk in his own garden, to pluck an apple from his own tree, nor to eat a potatoe grown in his own land; for he has got in his house an unbidden guest, who disputes the right of property with him, turns him out of his garden and places sentinels round the walls who refuse him admission and take good care that he shall not have a single apple or potatoe. Nay, spies and evesdroppers are employed to watch all his motions and to ascertain whether he has any thought of attempting to recover possession.⁸

One of his first experiences in the Congress Kingdom was a confrontation with an informer. Analysing this particular question, he found five classes of spy of 'various ranks and conditions, from the fashionable beau down to the

⁵ Norman Davies, *Heart of Europe*, Oxford, 1984 (hereafter *Heart of Europe*), p.163; Henryk Kocój, *Powstanie czy rewolucja?*, Katowice, 1981, p.15.

⁶ Davies, *Heart of Europe*, p. 165.

⁷ Harring, *Poland Under Russia*, p. 228.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 237, 238.

pedlar'.⁹ They worked with great success: 'hundreds and thousands were daily put under arrest, for some expression of their thoughts and feelings, not by writing, but orally, and with fear and hesitation!'¹⁰

The arrogance of the Russians was easy to observe:

A Russian officer who might meet a hackney droski, would turn a Pole out of it if he wanted to ride himself, and no other droski was near. Examples of this sort of insolent conduct I have often seen.¹¹

Harring gives us another story of the same sort:

General Markoff when he was only a captain of cavalry made his servant inflict a pretty severe punishment on a capuchin.¹² The capuchin was coming with a serf from the country to Warsaw. The pole of their vehicle touched Markoff's horse, which gave a sudden spring and put the horsemanship of the captain of the lancers to the test. In a furious rage he made the capuchin be well cudgelled and next day all Warsaw was shocked at the treatment given to the poor monk.

When I heard this story I asked what had been done to the gallant captain. The Russian who related it replied, 'what do you suppose could be done to him? Poland is a conquered country. Warsaw is occupied by foreign troops! Who dare resist?'¹³

Warsaw became a showpiece of tsarist power:

Warsaw swarms with Russian civil officers, most of whom are obliged to wear their official costume. The streets too are thronged with Russian equipages, for a Russian finds it easy to live in good style in Warsaw. There he receives his salary in silver roubles, while in Russia it would be paid to him only in paper. At the noon promenade in Warsaw, Russian carriages and four are seen driving one after another from the suburb of Cracow to St Alexander's Church: — and on the foot pavement Russian uniforms predominate.

A coachman in the Polish national livery is seldom seen in Warsaw; and if by a rare chance an old Pole should venture to show himself in his national costume, he seems to glide along like a midnight ghost.

In short, the national feeling of the Poles was, at this time, painfully wounded at every step in Warsaw, and it may easily be conceived that continued grievances preying upon the minds of all classes of the people grew at last into a bitter national hatred which longed for revenge.¹⁴

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 31, 32.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 255; *droski* means: cab.

¹² Member of R.C. religious order.

¹³ Harring, *Poland Under Russia*, pp. 246, 247.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 160, 161.

The November Insurrection

In November 1830 these explosive factors, as well as other influences, transformed a group of young cadets into zealous insurgents.¹⁵ The November Insurrection spread throughout the country. The Polish Diet dethroned the Tsar. A 40,000-strong Polish army, which in time was joined by about 140,000 civilians,¹⁶ faced the Russian army of 400,000 men bearing the victorious memory of a conquered Napoleon: After ten months of warfare with the Polish army, involving numerous battles, the Russians crushed the Insurrection. The invading army did find some allies in the Congress Kingdom, as a substantial part of the nation, mainly the Polish peasantry, were indifferent to the Insurrection. The Polish peasants in many places refused to fight and die for a country in which they had been serfs without any rights.¹⁷

The position of the peasant was very sad:

The Polish serf is in every part of the country extremely poor, and of all the living creatures I have met in this world, or seen described in books of natural history, he is the most wretched. He is in a worse situation than the Russian serf, who is maintained by his master, and has at least a subsistence in return for the cudgellings which he receives.¹⁸

The November Insurrection changed nothing in the life of Polish peasants and this was probably a major reason for its failure.

Sympathy of the Nations

¹⁵ Today the word 'revolution' quite often reminds us of the Bolsheviks, the October Revolution and the destructive fight with the enemies of the revolution and with the past. 'Revolution is a destruction of all those institutions which are deeply rooted in a society and which constitute the core of society' states one definition of this social event (Jerzy Jaruzelski, *Mackiewicz i konsekwatysci*, Warsaw, 1976, p. 94). Some people for this reason abhorred the words revolution or revolutionary. It was not so with the Insurgents of 1830. In the Polish Diet it was the most popular word for all parliamentarians. When counting this word in the speeches of the Diet the following proportion was shown: for every 350 times the word 'revolution' was mentioned, 'insurrection' occurred thirty-five times (Henryk Żalinski, *Stracone szanse, Wielka Emigracja o powstaniu listopadowym*, Warsaw, 1982, pp. 202, 252-53). When speaking of revolution they meant insurrection. The goal of insurrection was not the destruction of any institution but a change of government. The Revolution should be on a national scale, with everybody's consent. The social aspects of the Revolution were not so certain and were never accomplished. Obviously these were not the ruthless revolutionaries as we understand them today.

¹⁶ Marian Kukiel, *Dzieje Polski poprzbiorowe*, London, 1961, pp. 210, 211. The total number of men serving in the Polish army during the Insurrection was 170,000-190,000.

¹⁷ Józef Dutkiewicz, *Wybór źródeł Powstania Listopadowego*, Wrocław, 1957, pp. 78, 79; Kazimierz Deczyński, *Pamiętnik chłopca nauczyciela*, Warsaw, 1950, pp. 54, 55, 56; R.F.Leslie, *Polish Politics and the Revolution of November 1830*, London, 1956 (hereafter *Polish Politics and the Revolution*), pp. 172-77.

¹⁸ Harring, *Poland Under Russia*, pp. 255, 256.

The manner in which the November Insurrection had been crushed did not cause any European government to come to the aid of the Poles. Many people in Europe, however, responded to it with great warmth and sympathy. Some politicians, writers and journalists condemned Russia for occupying the country, for imprisoning and deporting its people and for their reign of terror.

As a sufferer, whose real and deep affliction is generally known always finds sympathy in the allied hearts of man, so the Pole has everywhere the voice of mankind on his side, and in all places where he appears is regarded, nay even overwhelmed with compassion.

‘In the different countries of Europe, which I have visited’, writes Harro Harring:

I have seen this interest taken in the Poles, — an interest quite independent of the favour which many of them have found in the hearts of the fair friends of freedom in France or Italy. When we behold a man who has come from a land of bondage where his brethren remain in chains confined in three great prison houses; when we reflect on the sufferings of his whole race, and on the manner in which his whole country has been oppressed and betrayed; — when we hear of the sacrifices fruitlessly made for deliverance and emancipation, we contemplate the stronger with inward emotion ...¹⁹

This sincere sympathy helped Polish exiles in many European countries where they settled after escaping from Russian power in 1831. It also assisted the Poles landing in Portsmouth.

The New Country and the Old

Britain was in a period of great social change. Industrialization opened for many the door to a decent life or even to prosperity. Emancipation of the Catholic Church had secured full civil and political rights for Roman Catholics (1829) and started the long but necessary diminution of the conflict with the Catholics in this country and in Ireland. The first of the great reform acts in 1832 began the move to extend certain political duties and privileges to all classes, admitting them to the electorate.

All these positive factors were very important for the newcomers.²⁰ However, they were unable to alter the very low opinion of their country of origin, which was prevalent in British government circles. Generally speaking, the English members of the government were indifferent, if not

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 170, 171.

²⁰ Peter Brock, *Z dziejów Wielkiej Emigracji w Anglii*, Warsaw, 1958 (hereafter *Z dziejów Wielkiej Emigracji*), p. 13.

hostile, to the uprising in partitioned Poland and to the Polish nation itself.²¹ Fortunately for the Poles they also found friends in British society and, as it happened, mainly among the Scots.²² Although they were unable to obtain political favours for the Poles, they gave them sufficient support to help them start a new life in their new home.

On 25 February 1832 Lord Dudley Coutts Stuart, with other friends of Poland, including Thomas Campbell the poet and philanthropist Thomas Wentworth, the Earl of Campertown, founded the Literary Association of the Friends of Poland. The main object of the new association was to 'assist in the diffusion of information respecting the rights and conditions of Poland'. The secondary task was that of 'affording assistance to Polish political exiles'.²³ Polish ex-soldiers in Portsmouth obtained the support that was so important for a fresh start in a new country.

In time some of the Poles moved to new places and settled in London, Edinburgh and Jersey. However, although dispersed around the country, in certain ways they remained strongly united. A common past, life in the army, battles for the freedom of Poland and imprisonment which they had all endured, bound them together. Against the background of the divisions in their past life, class inequalities (many of them were serfs in the Congress Kingdom of Poland), differences in life style, education and social position, there painfully grew a new and reformed nation in exile.

R. F. Leslie sees in Poland in the 1830s and the 1840s a resurrection of the public conscience.²⁴ If that was true about Poland it was also an everyday reality in the life of the exiles in Great Britain. In Portsmouth, Jersey and London the Polish exiles formed active groups working with a fervent energy on all the issues which concerned them and threw light on their own and current Polish problems. They called these groups: 'The Community of Polish People', under names such as: Grudziąz, Humań and Praga.²⁵ All referred to certain painful events well known to the emigrants from their sad past.

The whole community was involved in the soul-searching process. Again and again all the events of the past few years were discussed and judged. Some figures were openly praised, others bitterly accused of betraying the nation and for the failure of the Insurrection. Neglect of the Polish peasant and the failure to abolish serfdom were severely condemned. Because of their radical social views, completely opposed to the prevailing order in Austria, Prussia and Russia, Polish exiles appeared to outsiders as rebels and revolutionaries.

21 Norman Davies, 'British attitude to Poland, 1772-1832', *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, XVI, 1983, pp. 79-90.

22 *Ibid.*

23 Jerzy Zubrzycki, *Polish Immigrants in Britain*, The Hague, 1956 (hereafter *Polish Immigrants*), p.31.

24 Leslie, *Polish Politics and the Revolution*, London, 1956, p. 63.

25 Kalembka, *Wielka Emigracja*, pp. 186-200.

As a matter of fact, for many of the emigrants there was only one way to liberate their country from an autocratic system of government: a general uprising or, in other words, a revolution. They felt that the name 'revolutionary' was quite appropriate for them. Involvement in the Carbonari movement and membership of Masonic lodges were also accepted by these revolutionaries. Generally speaking, these secret or semi-secret organizations were anti-Catholic and anti-clerical. It is surprising then to find in the Polish exile group two Catholic priests assisting in their endeavours and apparently fulfilling their normal priestly duties.²⁶ This must have looked very suspicious to outsiders. It certainly attracted the attention of Polish historians who directed their attention first and foremost towards the figure of Rev. Alexander Pułaski (1800-38). In Poland his name had been linked with well-known political radicals. There was little doubt he was a member of the secret society of Carbonariis, and later the Freemasons Lodge,²⁷ and in France he was in open conflict with Mickiewicz and his friends. His speeches, articles and letters caused considerable controversy and this, together with his dismissal from the Democratic Society in France, was the reason for his departure to Britain. All this led to the questioning of his fidelity to the Catholic priesthood, to accusations of his involvement in certain bloody events in Poland and resulted in him being considered a troublemaker.²⁸

Co-operation with the Carbonariis and membership of a Masonic Lodge by a Catholic priest is difficult to understand today. Papal teaching was clear: this sort of social activity was forbidden. In the world of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, without today's mass communication, news spread very slowly. The Vatican had scanty and quite often distorted information about certain countries and events, e.g. the partitions of Poland and the Insurrections there. In turn Polish bishops found it often almost impossible to communicate with the Vatican.²⁹ In an age of autocracy, when the Church was considered to be subservient to the state authority, Papal letters in some countries were not read at all.³⁰ Promulgation of the law was very patchy, and even when known was not observed systematically. Although some Polish bishops informed the clergy and the faithful about the rules concerning Freemasonry, some did not and themselves became members of

26 Lidia i Adam Ciołkoszowie, *Zarys dziejów socjalizmu polskiego*, London, 1966, p. 66; Brock, *Z dziejów Wielkiej Emigracji*, p. 44. (Father Zienkiewicz stays in Portsmouth, p. 45; Father Pułaski moved to London in August 1835.)

27 Ludwik Hass, *Wolnomularstwo w Europie środkowo wschodniej w XVIII i XIX wieku*, Wrocław, 1982 (hereafter *Wolnomularstwo w Europie ...*), pp. 323, 327.

28 Marian Kukiel, *Dzieje Polski porozbiorowe*, London, 1961, pp. 218, 232, 246; *Polska Misja Katolicka w Londynie*, London, 1944 (hereafter *Polska Misja Katolicka*), p.46.

29 Hanna Dylągowa, *Duchowieństwo katolickie wobec sprawy narodowej (1764-1864)*, Lublin, 1983 (hereafter *Duchowieństwo katolickie*), p. 26.

30 Hass, *Wolnomularstwo w Europie ...*, pp. 70, 77.

such organizations.³¹ A number of the local clergy followed their example. The funeral of the Grand Master of the Polish Freemason Lodge in Warsaw, with the Archbishop and many clergy officiating at it, demonstrates the confusion in Church circles.³² In conclusion, 'it seems that the Vatican rules forbidding membership of the secret societies had no influence on the Catholic clergy in Poland'.³³ However, it must be acknowledged that, in some places, strong anti-masonic feelings did exist and resulted occasionally in violent incidents.

New researches show Rev. A. Pułaski in a changed light. He was an intelligent and very gifted young man. It is worth remembering that he became well known in public life at the age of thirty. Enthusiastic, passionate and fearlessly critical, he easily aroused the enmity of ambitious and jealous persons. His personality was charismatic. The sermons he preached and the lectures he gave always attracted a large number of people, including the Catholic clergy.³⁴ He knew how to inflame the human spirit, but in certain potentially dangerous situations he used his talents to pacify the crowds.³⁵ He was also a good writer, a journalist and a man of great courage. As Chaplain of General Dwernicki's Corps he was seen in battle holding a cross.³⁶ It is true that in the last years of his life he left his religious order as there were no Pijars in Great Britain, and in this sense he was an ex-Pijar. But he was not an ex-priest. In the letters written to him he was always addressed as *ksiądz* (Reverend). Lelewel writes in one of his letters that Rev. A. Pułaski was a supporter of a Catholic and Papist group, together with Mickiewicz, Zaleski and Jański, and that he intended to print an essay about Christianity and Catholicism in London.³⁷

Communities of Polish people in Great Britain published several articles and pamphlets, presenting radical ideas on both social and religious issues. These ideas, radical for the nineteenth century, demanded social reforms, yet they were always true to the spirit of the Gospel.³⁸ Rev. A. Pułaski and

31 *Ibid.*, p. 273.

32 Jerzy Kłoczowski, *Chrześcijaństwo w Polsce*, Lublin, 1980 (hereafter *Chrześcijaństwo w Polsce*), p. 212.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 209.

34 Henryk Żaliński, *Stracone szanse — Wielka Emigracja o powstaniu listopadowym*, Warsaw, 1982 (hereafter *Stracone szanse*), pp. 202, 252-53.

35 Stefan Kieniewicz, *Historia Polski 1795-1918*, Warsaw, 1983 (hereafter *Historia Polski*), p. 109.

36 Żaliński, *Stracone szanse*, p. 252.

37 Marian Tyrowicz, *Z dziejów polskich ruchów społecznych w XIX wieku*, Warsaw, 1965, pp. 46, 47.

38 Kieniewicz, *Historia Polski*, p. 142.

another Polish priest, Rev. Wincenty Zienkiewicz (+1854), working for the Poles in Britain, were the authors and inspiration behind these pamphlets.³⁹

The exiles in Portsmouth came from a country which, like other countries in Europe, was affected by a process of secularization. Religion among the rich and educated classes became a matter of tradition and occasional celebration, not an inner conviction. In these circles divorce became popular and deep knowledge of the faith was very rare. Moreover, education of the clergy and interest in theology were very poor.⁴⁰ The situation worsened with the dissolution of the Jesuits and later with Gregory XVI's encyclical letter condemning the November Insurrection. The whole nation felt deeply hurt by the insensitivity of the Roman Pontiff and his readiness to co-operate with the non-Catholic, oppressive and cruel Tsar.

Although religion was still very strong in the villages and in closed communities, exiled Poles of all classes were not particularly faithful to God. They were not fervent Catholics and they did not fulfil their religious duties.⁴¹ Conflicts, offensive language, drunkenness, disrespect for public money, cases of theft, fights with their countrymen and with local Englishmen occurred quite often.⁴² The priests in fulfilling their pastoral duties did not have an easy task, yet their efforts did bear fruit. A letter of 15 January 1834 disclosed that the Poles were in the habit of morning and evening prayer⁴³ and, as we discover from further sources, their morale was high. A journalist from *The Times* left a memorial to their life describing his visit to Portsmouth.

In *The Times* of 28 August 1834 we read:

A traveller passing through Portsmouth thus describes the present condition of the exiles resident there: 'Before I sailed for the Isle of Wight, I visited the depot of Polish soldiers at Portsmouth. You will be delighted to hear some particulars of this remnant of an heroic army that not long ago won the admiration of the world by its valour; and small as it was in number, withstood for nearly one year the whole power of the colossus of the north. A building, formerly an hospital, is assigned to them by the Government as barracks, where they live in harmony with each other, having elders at their head and officers of menage — a semblance of a family. A penal code and an honorary tribunal is constituted by them for the maintenance of good order and discipline, and punishment is inflicted on the culprits, as I was told, to the sound of their national songs, to drown the cries of the sufferers. This proves how anxious they are to preserve the honour of their country untarnished and to render themselves, by their orderly conduct, not undeserving of the generosity of that nation which granted them an asylum and support. Some have found employment in the town and its vicinity during the harvest. All are panting after labour, and their employers bestow on them the praises of perseverance and dexterity. If you had seen them, you would have been pleased at the neat

39 *Historia katolicyzmu społecznego w Polsce, 1832-1939*, Warsaw, 1981, pp. 49-53.

40 Kłoczowski, *Chrześcijaństwo w Polsce*, pp. 221, 212.

41 Dylągowa, *Duchowieństwo katolickie*, p.119.

42 Peter Brock gives examples on many pages (*Z dziejów Wielkiej Emigracji*).

43 *Ibid.*, p.51.

appearance of their clothes and the respect they show to British officers when any of them happens to pass by — a reverence which is left them from their old profession. Life in a camp has not impaired their moral feelings, and you would be pleased to see them every Sunday proceed in knots to church ...' ⁴⁴

From this account one is able to see the quality of life of the Polish exiles in Portsmouth: the traveller noticed the great emphasis placed on discipline in the barracks; incidents of transgressions of accepted rules met with severe punishment; the duty of Sunday Mass was strictly observed. Thus in their daily life the Poles in Britain presented a contrasting picture of moral faults and sincere religious feelings.

The number of Polish emigrants was steadily growing. In the year 1834 there were about 500 of them, and twenty years later about 700.⁴⁵ They now lived in different cities in England and Scotland and some of them married local girls. Their pastoral needs were somewhat complex, and the local clergy and former chaplains had difficulties in moving around the country. Rev. Pułaski died in 1838 and, at the urgent request of the exiles, the Literary Association of the Friends of Poland brought over a new Catholic priest from Poland. He was probably the Rev. Stefan Mazoch, who, in about 1837, was known to be officiating for the Poles in a hired Unitarian Chapel at Stamford Street, Blackfriars, in London. In 1842 Father Brzezinski celebrated Polish Masses in the Belgian Chapel in Southwark. He was also well known to Polish ex-soldiers in Portsmouth from his pastoral visits there. In 1853 another Polish priest, Rev. Emeryk Podelski moved to a chapel in Sutton Street, Soho Square, in London. He worked well with his community, and his spirit of self-sacrifice and love was evident from his decision to go with about a hundred of his parishioners to Turkey to fight in the Crimean war (1853-56) against the Russian oppressors of his motherland.⁴⁶ During the war he served as chaplain to the Polish unit of the Turkish army, and subsequently returned to England to continue his priestly duties in Polish communities. He died at the age of sixty-nine and was buried at St Mary's Cemetery, Kensal Green (no. 2655).⁴⁷

The small Polish community needed a clergyman of Polish origin. So General Zamoyski, well known to the local hierarchy, and Cardinal Wiseman exercised their influence. As a result, by a special decision of the Primate of Poland, Przyłuski, Rev. Dr Chwaliszewski arrived to work in Britain in 1862. Gen. Zamoyski did his best to help him. No doubt he rented and furnished a chapel and also found accommodation for the priest.

⁴⁴ Brock, *Z dziejów Wielkiej Emigracji*, pp. 158-59. Portsmouth was a place of work for Father Zienkiewicz; *ibid.*, p. 56. *The Jersey Argus* from 16 June 1835 writes about Poles on the island with a commentary praising the good character and dignified manners of the exiles there. Jersey was under the care of Father Pułaski.

⁴⁵ *Polska Misja Katolicka*, p.45.

⁴⁶ Zubrzycki, *Polish Immigrants*, p.37; *Polska Misja Katolicka*, p. 8.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

Rev. Chwaliszewski, meanwhile, ministered to his parishioners, visiting them, baptizing children, encouraging lapsed Catholics to return to the Church and comforting the elderly.

We next hear about a new priest in 1864 — a certain Father Dr Jazdżewski. His presence was indispensable for new arrivals from Poland after the collapse of the January Uprising. Exiles from Poland were ignorant of the language and without accommodation. Quite often there were young families with small children. Others created great problems for the priest on account of their lifestyle. Such a one was L. Żychliński, who was an adventurer of incredible courage and imagination. He fought the tsarist oppressors in Poland, later married an English girl in Great Britain whom he abandoned to fight in the United States, and subsequently returned to Poland where he was arrested and sent to Siberia for many years.⁴⁸

Father Jazdżewski's task was very difficult. Apart from caring for adults, he had to find help for the children. With the collaboration of French Bishops and charitable organizations, about 100 children were found places in Catholic boarding schools in France. Difficult conditions, lack of financial support and failing health forced Father Jazdżewski to abandon his duties and leave Great Britain after two years of hard work.⁴⁹ But the needs of the Poles were great and they vociferously asked for a Polish priest.

In 1867 a Committee of Polish exiles, with the permission of Archbishop Manning, acquired two floors at 110 Gower Street. Here they had ample space for a Polish chapel, a library and meeting rooms. For ten years it was probably the one and only Polish centre in London and indeed in England.⁵⁰ By this time (1870) the number of Poles in Great Britain had grown to 1,500.

In 1870 a young Pole, Bernard Łubieński, who entered the Redemptorist Order in London, was ordained priest. His spiritual qualities and the trust of his Superiors decided his duties. Father Łubieński became the secretary of the Provincial,⁵¹ which isolated him from any pastoral work. In spite of this, he found the time to visit the Polish communities.⁵²

The life of the Redemptorists is consecrated to the service of the poor, and Father Łubieński saw a realization of his vocation in the service of Polish exiles. Up to 1882 he helped the Poles, with the blessing of his Superior, Fr Coffin. In 1882, he was transferred to Austria and later to Poland to organize anew the Province of the Redemptorist Fathers, which had been dissolved.

48 Norman Davies, 'The January Insurrection in Poland, 1863-1864 in the light of British Consular Reports', *War and Society in East Central Europe*, Boulder, Colorado, 1984.

49 *Polska Misja Katolicka*, pp. 8-9.

50 Zubrzycki, *Polish Immigrants*, p. 38.

51 O. Marian Brudzisz, 'Redemptoryści polscy w służbie Kościoła w ostatnim stuleciu', *Homo Dei*, 189, 1983, no. 3, pp. 164, 165.

52 *Polska Misja Katolicka*, p. 9.

The number of Poles in Great Britain was apparently growing — in 1882 there were about 800 exiles in Liverpool alone.⁵³ Father Łubieński, long before he left England, realized that successful pastoral work demanded continuity and should be carried out by somebody devoted to this alone. With this in mind, he encouraged Father A. Bakanowski of the Order of the Resurrection to go to Britain in 1878.

Fr Bakanowski, with the help of the wife of Gen. Zamoyski and Lord Demhy, organized Polish Masses in the underground chapel of an Italian Church in Hatton Garden. The Italian priests had in the past helped the Polish community in the same way, allowing Fr. Jazdżewski to use their chapel.

The great zeal with which Fr Bakanowski started his work was halted after two years by a sudden and shocking event. On 10 January 1880 during a Mass celebrated in the chapel in Hatton Garden by Fr Bakanowski, a Swiss anarchist, Aleksander Scossa, tried to kill the priest. Five shots were fired at the victim but fortunately missed their mark. Another priest present in the chapel threw himself on the anarchist and disarmed him, taking away a revolver and a poisoned dagger.

The international Press gave the story widespread coverage⁵⁴ and Poles in London became a well-known community all over the world. Scossa was condemned to life imprisonment. This event, however, and the distress which it caused, did not help in the pastoral work. Father Bakanowski was recalled from his post by his religious superiors and in August 1880 he left Great Britain. At that time the Polish community in Liverpool had its own priest from Poland, Father Dutkiewicz, who worked there with great success. Unfortunately, he did not get on very well with the local hierarchy and because of this he left Great Britain in 1881.⁵⁵

The period after 1882 was a distressing time for Poles in Great Britain since after the transfer of Father Łubieński to Austria there was no Polish priest to provide pastoral care. In 1884, a member of the Jesuit Order, Father Kałuza, arrived from Germany in answer to the requests of the Polish exiles, to visit Polish communities throughout the country. He did speak Polish, but for some time afterwards pastoral care over the Poles was exercised by non-Polish, German priests. After Father Kałuza, a German Jesuit took over, who had to learn Polish to be able to serve the emigrants as confessor. In 1887 Father Linden worked for a short time among the Polish exiles in Great Britain.

With the coming years, the number of Polish exiles in Great Britain did not diminish but on the contrary showed some signs of growth. In 1890 there

⁵³ Zubrzycki, *Polish Immigrants*, p. 38.

⁵⁴ See *The Times*, 12 January 1880, 'Attempted assasination of Priests'; *The Times*, 13 January 1880, title as above; *The Times*, 16 January 1880, 'The attempted Murder in the Italian Church'.

⁵⁵ *Polska Misja Katolicka*, p. 9.

were about 1,000 Poles in London alone.⁵⁶ There were also a number of Polish workers in Lancashire and their need for a Polish-speaking priest was not satisfied by the Church authorities. This situation was apparently obvious to the local clergy and encouraged another German priest to take a courageous decision.

Father Josef von Lassberg was professor of Canon Law in the Jesuit Seminary in Ditton Hall, Lancashire. He learnt Polish and Lithuanian and this enabled him to serve both communities. Father von Lassberg visited Polish exiles in Liverpool to celebrate Mass for the Poles and Lithuanians in the Catholic Church at Eldon Street. There, on 20 August 1889, Father von Lassberg solemnly blessed a picture of Our Lady of Vilno venerated by the Polish and Lithuanian communities alike. His extraordinary pastoral zeal could be seen by the eight-day mission he organized in Silvertown (next to the Albert docks) and in a number of other pastoral visits to London. It was Father von Lassberg who realized that there must be about 1,000 Poles in London and his notes, written in Polish, convey much information about the Polish exiles. They were one of the poorest classes of people living in England, exploited by dishonest employers, lapsing from the Catholic faith, and without proper pastoral care.⁵⁷ The work of Father von Lassberg and his compassion towards the Polish emigrants is an outstanding testimony of his deeply Christian personality and priestly virtues.

There were attempts by the Bishop of Liverpool to prepare an Irish priest to work with the Poles, requesting of him that he learn the Polish language; but we have no knowledge as to whether this bore any fruit.⁵⁸

Towards the end of the nineteenth century Whitechapel became very attractive for Poles living in the City. About 500 families settled there and one can see that this borough became a centre for Polish religious and social life for some time. The reason was that the prospects of employment there were good. Whitechapel was by this time quite densely populated by the more affluent Jews, emigrants from Poland and Russia. A common language and the possibility of reliable and cheap labour made them good employers for Poles looking for work.⁵⁹ 'In view of the great similarity of causes of emigration from Poland of the two racially distinct groups, the Christian Poles and the Polish Jews, it seems reasonable to suppose that there was on the whole a positive correlation between the Jewish and the Polish emigration.'⁶⁰

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 9, 10.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁵⁹ Zubrzycki, *Polish Immigrants*, p. 39.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

Conclusion

The study of the life of Polish emigrants in Great Britain in the sixty years from 1830 to 1890 yields an interesting picture of the conditions in which they lived and worked. There also developed among them a sense of duty towards Poland and a readiness to work for its freedom. Furthermore, the exiles felt drawn to the Catholic Church, which was closely linked to Polish culture. Hence the demand for a Polish priest. In the space of sixty years the community spread from one place, Portsmouth, to three regions — of which London, and Whitechapel in particular, was the most important centre. In 1888 there were about 500 Poles, and the Catholic Centre, as well as the Polish Society, established their offices in this borough. Silvertown had about 700 Poles working in Beckton Gas Works. Poplar, Leytonstone and Bethnal Green also attracted a number of Poles. Lanarkshire in Scotland, especially the districts of Motherwell and Bothwell, had approximately 1,500 Poles. The third important Polish settlements were in Poole, Manchester and Cheshire. The mobility of the Polish population makes it difficult to calculate the numbers.⁶¹

Some exiles, mostly ex-soldiers, received a small government pension. The Literary Society of Friends of Poland also used its modest funds to help those in greatest need.

There were even attempts to organize a co-operative and, under the Presidency of Father Brzezinski, the 'Polish Clothing Association' was formed.⁶² Most of the emigrants, though, had to support themselves, accepting odd jobs which barely enabled them to survive.⁶³

During the first decades after the Emancipation, the Catholic Church in Great Britain had many problems. Creation of the hierarchy, the organization of new parishes, building new churches and staffing them with priests — these were the first duties of local Catholic communities. The needs of small groups of Polish exiles were less important to local Catholic leaders. Thus the problem of obtaining a Polish priest to work in the communities was left to the ingenuity of the Poles themselves — with some exceptions, of course.

Cardinal Wiseman asked the Primate of Poland, the Most Rev. L. Przyłuski, for a priest dedicated to pastoral work among the Poles in England. This was the first such request (1862). Later there were further requests and subsequently every Primate of Poland became the Protector of Polish exiles all over the world. The loneliness of the Polish priest in Britain and the indifference to the needs of the Polish community is illustrated by the work of Father Jazdżewski, who, following the influx of Polish exiles after the January Uprising, located — with the help of French bishops — 100 Polish children in

⁶¹ Zubrzycki, *Polish Immigrants*, pp. 39-42.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁶³ *Polska Misja Katolicka*, pp. 9, 10.

Catholic schools and convents *in France!* The same reasons may probably explain the frequent changes of Polish priests serving the Polish communities in Britain. In the space of sixty years about twelve priests served the Polish communities in Great Britain.⁶⁴ The work was not organized and systematic, but short and patchy, and did not always fulfil the needs of the exiled communities.

64	Year	Name	Number of Poles in G.B.
	1833	Rev. K. Pułaski	500
		Rev. W. Zienkiewicz	
	1837	Rev. Stefan Mazoch*	
	1842	Rev. Brzezinski	
	1844-49	Rev. Brzezinski (1)	
	1851-58	Rev. W. Zienkiewicz (1)	
	1853	Rev. Emeryk Podelski	760
	1858-85	Rev. Emeryk Podolski (1)	
	1862	Rev. Dr Chwaliszewski	700
	1863-64	Rev. Martin Chwaliszewski (1)	
	1864	Rev. Dr Jazdzewski	
	1865	Rev. Louis Jazdzewski (1)	
	1870	Rev. Bernard Łubieński	1,500
	1872-82	Rev. Bernard Łubieński (1)	
	1878	Rev. A. Bakanowski	
	1879-80	Rev. A. Bakanowski (1)	
		Rev. Dutkiewicz	
	1887	Rev. Linden	
	1889	Rev. Josef von Lassberg	3,500

(1) The name entered in the Catholic Directory, London, year as above.

* In the papers telling us about the history of Polish life in nineteenth-century Britain, one reads the name of Rev. Stefan Mazoch saying Mass for the Poles in the Unitarian Chapel, Blackfriars, London. That is all we know about this person, who later vanishes into oblivion.

There is some doubt as to whether he was a Catholic priest. Taking into consideration inter-denominational relations in the nineteenth century and the hostility of Unitarians towards the Catholics, it is difficult to imagine a Catholic priest in a Unitarian chapel unless he was a priest expelled from a diocese by his own bishop, meaning of course an ex-priest. It may be worth mentioning that, at that time, the Unitarian Church had some followers in Poland. Father Mazoch may have been a minister of this church, hoping to establish a new Polish group in England.

The Polish Catholic Mission in London (1894-1939)

The Polish minority in Britain suffered many hardships in their everyday life. They were poor and close to the bottom of the social structure, but as a community they were very mature. In 1886 the two Polish organizations existing in London, handicapped by the small number of voluntary workers and duplication of their work, were merged into one. And so the old Democratic Society in London, formed forty-six years previously, fused with the new Society of Polish Workers in Great Britain. This new organization assumed the name 'The Polish Society in London'.⁶⁵

In the work of the new Polish Society one is aware of a sense of responsibility for the problems of the Poles in the whole country.⁶⁶ In 1891 the newly-formed Society appealed to the Archbishop of Westminster for a Polish priest and for the establishment of a permanent Polish Catholic Mission. But to no avail; for Card. Manning and his diocesan advisers this problem was not at all pressing.

In 1892 London had a new Archbishop. Herbert Vaughan took charge of the Archdiocese of Westminster. In 1893 he became a Cardinal. He was a man from the north and for twenty years had served the Church in the diocese of Salford (of which Manchester is the principal city). He was a modest and hard-working man. His modesty was such that in the history of the Salford diocese only one out of 255 pages was reserved for his achievements. But a serious examination of his work shows that he was an extraordinary administrator, a man who was creative and had a vision for the future, not at all a dreamer. His pragmatism and attention to detail secured the success of many of his projects, one of which was the new Westminster Cathedral.⁶⁷ For Polish exiles, from the perspective of almost 100 years, the establishment of the Polish Catholic Mission had an equally important character.

Cardinal Vaughan, as Bishop of Salford, had been very critical of the quality of Catholic life there. He noticed that many children in his diocese were losing their faith. In 1884, on his orders, the Diocesan Chapter started an investigation which ended in a census of all parishes. It was a very complicated and difficult task and its results showed the reason for the loss of faith among thousands of morally endangered children. The facts were very disturbing and Bishop Vaughan organized lay Catholics to combat the danger. Catholic social

⁶⁵ Zubrzycki, *Polish Immigrants*, p. 38.

⁶⁶ This is apparent in the urgent request, in 1891, to the Roman Catholic Archbishop of London, for a Polish priest dedicated to the work of Polish migrants and supported by a permanent Polish Mission in London.

⁶⁷ Edward Norman, *The English Catholic Church in the Nineteenth Century*, Oxford, 1984, pp. 345, 346.

clubs organized by him were also a great help and formed an important part of his strategy.⁶⁸

This parish census also supplied the Bishop with information about the Polish community in Lancashire. Feeling responsible for these lost souls, Bishop Vaughan encouraged Father von Lassberg to work among the Polish and Lithuanian exiles. The two men lived in the same area and must have known each other.

In 1894, Cardinal Vaughan, as Archbishop of Westminster, also ordered a census in all parishes.⁶⁹ The results of the census were important to his plans for the pastoral work of the diocese and the proposed building of a new cathedral. They also confirmed the information obtained about the Polish community in his former diocese. This was possibly the reason behind the decision to establish the Polish Catholic Mission in London without delay.

Cardinal Manning had been somewhat slow in establishing a permanent pastoral post in London. However, he had tried to solve or at least alleviate the growing problems of the Polish community in his diocese. In 1889 a certain Miss Fanny Taylor visited Poznań on his behalf, possibly with a view to obtaining help from the Polish clergy. She contacted Cardinal Ledóchowski and the well-known Catholic leader Edmund Bojanowski. She also visited a few Polish convents which impressed her by the standard of their spiritual life and their ability to adapt to the needs of the poor of the country. Her lack of Polish, however, created difficulties, and the possibility of bringing to England sisters who owed obedience to superiors in a foreign country rendered the project unacceptable. Miss Taylor's interpreter on this mission was a young Redemptorist from London: Bernard Łubieński, on holiday in his native country.⁷⁰

Cardinal Vaughan followed Card. Manning's example by looking to a Polish religious order for the help which the Poles needed. His practical mind and personal involvement soon yielded positive results, and he found Rome a better place to conclude such an agreement. Mother Franciszka Siedliska, superior of a new Polish religious order, the Sisters of the Holy Family, showed an interest in the work among Polish migrants in London. The same readiness to go to London was shared by the spiritual director of the new order, Father Antoni Lechert. Father Lechert, founder of a small society of priests, was also able to supply a Polish priest to work in the Polish community in London. Monsignor Bronikowski, director of the Polish Mission in London,⁷¹ used his influence to persuade Mother Siedliska to make

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 353, 364, 365.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 366.

⁷⁰ Amelia Szafranska, *Surdut czy rewerenda*, Warsaw, 1979, pp. 353-60.

⁷¹ Antonio Riccardi, *His Will Alone*, Oshkosh, Wisconsin, 1971 (hereafter *His Will Alone*), p. 264. The official title of Monsignor Bronikowski (Director of the Polish Mission in London) must be proof that the Polish Mission was already in existence.

a positive decision. And so, the London House of the Sisters of the Holy Family was founded in September 1895.⁷²

The Polish Sisters were a great asset to the newly-opened Polish Mission, and to the whole community in general, as there were now experienced and responsible nuns visiting the sick and elderly members of the community. For many, they were representatives both of their religion and of their national culture. They knew the language and traditions of the mother country, and one may suppose that they were a source of immense joy and comfort to the elderly exiles in particular.⁷³ The younger generation were also in need of help. Nineteenth-century English society was fiercely anti-Catholic, so to face the problems of life in this society as members of the Catholic Church they needed instruction and advice.

The Sisters, with their congregation steadily growing in number, were able to secure a future for their community in Great Britain and so brought hope of a better spiritual life to all Polish migrants. The most important effect of their coming, however, was on the staffing of the Polish Mission. Father Lechert, their associate and spiritual director, was responsible for this task. Card. Vaughan indeed appeared to have solved the problem of pastoral care for the Poles in London.

At around the end of nineteenth century certain English bishops began to realize that due to the substantial number of Polish exiles in Great Britain and their constant demands, the organization of pastoral care for them was desirable and should remain in the hands of Polish priests. Obviously the opportunities for small migrant communities to voice their wishes, and more importantly, to be heard, were limited. Moreover, their ability to support the cost of a pastoral centre was non-existent.

The Poles in London, however, were in a special position, since their strong and united organization was respected by local authorities. In addition, the Polish community was represented by eminent personalities who were well thought of in Catholic circles, so the 3,000 Poles spread throughout a few London boroughs were in a position to offer material support to a permanent Polish priest. Nevertheless, they also needed the understanding of a wise bishop who was ready to accept a priest from an unknown country and of unknown background. Cardinal Vaughan was that bishop. Thus, in 1894, the Polish Mission in London came into existence.

The years following the establishment of the Polish Mission are poorly recorded in Church archives. The Archbishop's Decree concerning the creation of the Polish Mission has not survived. However, sufficient proof about the first year of its activity is given in a letter from Cardinal Vaughan to certain unknown persons, possibly the committee of the Polish Society, in

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 422.

⁷³ *Polska Misja Katolicka*, p. 15.

which he expresses his worries about the number of Poles in London and their needs. He also mentions the necessity for a Polish Church and a Polish Mission. The letter is dated 14 July 1894.⁷⁴ Also by this time, a bank account had been opened for 'The London Polish Mission Fund'.

The oldest entry in the Register of Baptisms of the Polish Catholic Mission in London is dated 23 September 1894,⁷⁵ so the probable date for the establishment of the Polish Mission was around the end of July or August 1894. The Catholic Directory, Ecclesiastical Register and Almanac officially notes in 1896 (p. 116) that the Polish Mission exists at 313 Mile End Road, East London. In the following years more information can be gleaned about the Mission from the Mission's documents and a description of the rubber stamp used by the office.⁷⁶

The stability of pastoral work among Poles was greatly reinforced by the foundation of a new Convent of the Sisters of the Holy Family.⁷⁷ Polish Sisters in London were desperately needed to take care of children, the sick, the elderly and the lonely. This diaspora — living far away from a Polish church and priest — could only be helped by constant house to house visits. The priests, who at that time tended not to stay for long in one locality, were not able to satisfy the spiritual needs of their communities. Consequently, it was not very long before almost all Poles with any problems, including confessions, conversions and marriages, asked the Sisters for advice and guidance.

The work and influence of the Sisters in the life of the Polish community was such that, for some, they were the true founders of the Polish Mission in London. They had to pay dearly though for their good work, experiencing the hatred of some London Protestants who damaged their property to such an extent that it was necessary to call the police.⁷⁸ Apart from personal problems with the neighbours, they experienced problems with their charity work. The presence of the Sisters in Britain was important for the Poles, who needed a Polish-speaking person to counsel and guide them. The Sisters extended their help also to the children by organizing a school where the Polish language was taught. Initially, the parents welcomed this, yet after some time the Sisters noticed that the number of Polish children in their school was diminishing. The reason was that the Sisters did not have professional teaching qualifications and so were not able to issue their pupils with valid certificates of secondary education. And so, in time, attendance at the School dropped to

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁷⁵ Zubrzycki, *Polish Immigrants*, p. 39.

⁷⁶ *Polska Misja Katolicka*, p. 13.

⁷⁷ In September 1885; see Riccardi, *His Will Alone*, p. 442.

⁷⁸ *Polska Misja Katolicka*, p. 14.

only sixteen children.⁷⁹ This deprived the Sisters of an important source of income for the upkeep of their Convent and their daily expenses. Finally, they were forced to move to inferior accommodation and became teachers in an English Catholic school in London.⁸⁰

The instability and misery of their first years in London were deepened by lack of support and guidance from the Directors of the Polish Mission in London. The priests supplied by Father Lechert were not sufficiently prepared to work in a country with a different culture, language and a hostile attitude towards the Catholic Church. Moreover, the community among whom they worked was bilingual, being made up of Poles and Lithuanians. They themselves needed guidance and showed little interest in the life of the Polish Sisters. So the Sisters of the Holy Family asked the local English priest to celebrate Mass for them and to hear their confessions.

*The First Years of the New Mission*⁸¹

In the past, the priest alone had been the centre of pastoral activity in Polish communities in Great Britain. All he required was modest accommodation and a small salary to cover necessary expenses. The creation of a Polish Mission, however, increased the number of persons working among the Poles in London, as the Sisters of the Holy Family helped in the pastoral work. From the beginning of its existence, many changes occurred in the life of the Mission and its pastoral work among the exiles.

In 1895 Monsignor Wincenty Bronikowski, exhausted by his work in Britain, although his stay in this country was rather short (no more than a year), quit his post for good. His last Mass was said on 21 April 1895. Following his departure Father Stanisław Królikowski temporarily ministered to the Poles, from 2 June 1895 to 25 August 1895, up until the arrival of the Sisters and Father Lechert.

Father Lechert was nominated Director of the Polish Mission in July 1895. The former priest's house and Polish chapel were now unsuitable for the new team so a larger house was found in Mile End, in the Shadwell area.⁸² After some repainting and alterations, it provided a residence for the priest, the Sisters, and a site for the Polish chapel. The chapel consisted of two adjacent rooms in the house and was opened on 22 September 1895. The new Director of the Mission started his duties in style. The Mass on 25 September 1895 inaugurated a week's parish Mission which he himself preached in Polish and a Jesuit Priest in Lithuanian. The community, fired by the energy and spirituality of the new Rector, accepted the idea with enthusiasm. Sadly, such a

⁷⁹ Ricciardi, *His Will Alone*, p. 295.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 296.

⁸¹ *Polska Misja Katolicka*; for the data for this subchapter, see pp. 14-20.

⁸² *The Catholic Directory*, London, 1896, p. 116.

promising start was soon beset by many problems, the main one being finding suitable priests.

In spite of his good intentions and zeal Father Lechert was overburdened by his duties, resulting in almost complete exhaustion. He was confessor and counsellor to Mother Siedliska, ready to follow her on many trips to different countries. His duties as the Superior of a small congregation of priests, called Missionaries of Divine Love, founded by himself, tied him to the Mother House in France. So for him as a Director of the Polish Mission in Britain, real pastoral care of the Poles was impossible and all he could manage was a short monthly visit to London. His hopes lay in the priests trained in the seminary of his congregation who would continue the work of the Polish Mission.

The first such priest was Father Józef Schroeter. Newly ordained in France, he arrived in London in February 1896 where he celebrated his first Mass in the Mission chapel. With youthful enthusiasm he started his new work, preaching on Sundays in Polish and Lithuanian. His dedicated service to the community was ended abruptly by a severe and dangerous illness and some time after 12 June 1896 he left Britain for France, where he died a short time later.⁸³

Father Tomasz Przybylski, who arrived on 31 May 1896, was the second priest from the congregation. Young and without experience, he started work in the new country with ambitious plans. He successfully registered on 6 August 1896 a Society of Our Lady and St Casimir, whose main purpose was self-help for members of the Lithuanian community. On 10 October 1896 Father Przybylski left for Rome, probably due to illness, as a year later, already gravely ill, he sent a letter to the Lithuanians in London.

On 13 November 1896 Father Ludwik Wojtys from Poznan arrived. He was linguistically gifted and learned Lithuanian in a very short time. Nevertheless, the difficulties of the work and of co-operation with Father Lechert were too great for him, and a few months later, around February 1897, he left London.

Newcomers were quite possibly disappointed by the fact that the community did not possess its own church or at least a large chapel. To satisfy this need Father Lechert made considerable efforts, in 1896, to acquire a building for a church. His endeavours bore fruit and in that same year he bought a new property at 184a Cambridge Road, north-east London. It was an old stable without roof or floor, but its walls were sturdy enough. Father Lechert, along with four brothers from his religious order, reconstructed the building and adapted it to serve as a small church. It was used for this purpose

⁸³ In the notes of the Mission of that time, a priest called Josef Albertini is mentioned. It is probably the same person, but the reason for the different names is at present difficult to explain.

from August 1896 under the name of St Joseph and St Casimir, even though the building was certainly not yet fully renovated or furnished. From February 1897 until August of the same year, Father Lechert was the only Polish priest ministering to the local Polish community, albeit somewhat irregularly.

In August 1897 Father Bakanowski (not the same Father Bakanowski mentioned earlier) arrived to help him in his duties. He was a newly ordained priest, though already fifty years old, as his was a 'late vocation'. Father Lechert introduced him to pastoral work in the Polish Mission in London and from 22 August 1897 Father Bakanowski was left in charge of the Mission. He soon learned Lithuanian and became very popular in the Lithuanian community. Unfortunately, his apparently difficult character caused many problems to all in his care as well as to his superiors and, furthermore, he deepened the chasm between the Polish and Lithuanian communities. Certain tensions and disagreements between Father Lechert and the Sisters of the Holy Family were also a result of his influence. However, when Father Bakanowski made false accusations to Card. Vaughan against Father Lechert and the Sisters, Father Lechert decided to remove the turbulent priest from his post. He left on 28 July 1899.

The general situation at the Polish Mission and in the community earned a severe rebuke from Card. Vaughan who, in one of his letters, referred to these events as the 'Polish mess'.⁸⁴ Father Bakanowski responded to his discharge from the Mission in his own fashion — he left his religious order. However, he had a change of heart and decided to enter a very severe, reformed Cistercian Order to isolate himself from the conflicts which he was unable to avoid. With the help of the Sisters of the Holy Family, who promised to repay the money he had borrowed, he probably accomplished his plans successfully. In the meantime, from the 5 November 1899 Father Władysław Bajerowicz ministered to the Poles in London.

Searching for information about the work of Polish priests in London, it is vital to view their duties in the context of all the problems they had to face. The origins of the problems lay in a new country, language, tradition, the attitude to Roman Catholics in Britain and in the character of the migrant community itself.

The first impression of every new Polish priest in the Polish Mission was that the social composition of his community was very complex. In the past, Poland and Lithuania had been members of the same Commonwealth. After the Third Partition of 1795, secret organizations preparing the population for the struggle for independence and freedom of the Commonwealth were active in both countries. The Uprisings which shook Poland had repercussions

⁸⁴ Letter to Lady Herbert dated 16 August 1899, *Polska Misja Katolicka*, p. 17.

leading to a heavy loss of life in Lithuania.⁸⁵ The political emigrants who arrived in the British Isles were often from both countries and formed united political groups. In everyday life differences between them were probably minimal, to the effect that it was possible to describe Lithuanians as Poles speaking a different language.⁸⁶ Most Lithuanians also knew the Polish language well and communicated with Poles easily. Sunday worship was normally in the same church. From the beginning, however, it was obvious that in church differences of language and national culture must be respected. Thus both languages were used during Mass whenever possible. Back in the mother country Lithuanian hymns and a Polish sermon, or Polish hymns and a Lithuanian sermon, were usually the rule in parishes consisting of a Polish-Lithuanian population.⁸⁷ Thus the centuries-old tradition in the old Commonwealth was helping the exiles in Britain.

However, in some parts of partitioned Poland a new generation of young people grew up without personal knowledge of the traditions of the past. Thus, for a number of Polish priests serving in England at around the end of nineteenth century, it was a new experience to have to work in two languages. To harmonize the life of the two communities in such circumstances a priest would need exceptional intelligence, combined with prudence and a deep understanding of the problems facing members of both communities. The Polish-Lithuanian communities in Britain suffered from a lack of priests prepared to work in such difficult conditions.

The hardships of life helped to bring about a separation of the Polish and Lithuanian elements. In the first years, relations between newcomers in a new country were very close. Yet, after a number of years, having acquired a better knowledge of life in England, especially in the area of work and housing, a rift developed which made effective communication increasingly difficult. Distance, and lack of opportunity to meet and discuss important subjects, estranged former friends from each other and deepened the divisions. And so the life of the exiles in small communities, their loneliness and everyday hardships, led to the slow separation of the two communities. Rising nationalistic feelings on both sides worsened and inflamed certain situations. The Russian secret service was undoubtedly exacerbating the conflicts,⁸⁸ which in 1894 were indeed considerable and even brought accusations of 'ensnaring' Lithuanians by the Polish community and the Polish church.⁸⁹

These suspicions were the main reason for a growing separatist movement within the Lithuanian group. On 13 August 1899 the separatists adopted

85 Davies, *Heart of Europe*, p. 168.

86 Jerzy Ochmansik, *Historia Litwy*, Wrocław, 1982, p. 7.

87 Ks. Walerian Meysztowicz, *Poszło z dynem*, 1973, p. 129.

88 See Albert Potocki, *Raporty Szpiega*, Warsaw, 1973.

89 *Polska Misja Katolicka*, pp. 11-13.

violent methods to deepen the divisions. Four men standing at the entrance to the Polish-Lithuanian church threatened and even physically abused the pro-Polish Lithuanian members of the parish. The tension and danger of street violence resulted a week later in a number of policemen being assigned to keep public order in the vicinity of the Polish church.⁹⁰

The attitude of Poles was on the whole understanding and helpful. The priests did their best to learn the Lithuanian language and they supported the creation of an official Lithuanian self-help organization. Mrs Zofia Pace, a benefactor of the Polish community, contributed to it generously. Apparently they assessed the situation as being so complicated that an alternative solution must have seemed impossible.

Changes in the nineteenth-century life of the Polish nation accelerated the separation of Lithuanian and Polish Catholics in the church generally. Polish Catholic life and traditions, which in the past were acceptable to the Lithuanians, ceased now to be attractive to them.⁹¹ This division was unavoidable although it was undoubtedly humiliating for many Poles at the time. In 1901 a Lithuanian priest took charge of a separate parish for the Lithuanians in London. One may say that the Lithuanians became a separate pastoral entity with the help of Poles in London, and the nationalistic ferment met without visible resistance from the Polish members of the parish.

The process of separation of the two communities escalated in London substantially in the last years of the nineteenth century, and the opening of the Lithuanian church in 1901 finalized it. Therefore, since the beginning of the existence of the Polish-Lithuanian Mission in 1894 one may speak rather of the Polish Catholic Mission. This title remains to the present day.

The new century began auspiciously for the community. In January 1900 a new priest, Father Alojzy Foltin from Poland, arrived in London. Now two priests were serving the Mission, which was slowly changing its character, concentrating pastoral care on the Poles. Some time in the autumn of 1902 Father Foltin went to Manchester to organize pastoral work among the Polish-Lithuanian community which apparently had not yet divided there. In autumn of the same year Father Henryk Cichocki came to London. In all probability he was in charge of the Polish Mission, although the title of Rector or Director of the Mission was still given to Father Lechert. He was helped in his work by Father Gustaw Carvy and Father Ignacy Kłopotowski.

On 21 November 1902 Mother Siedliska suddenly died in Rome. This event influenced, in some ways, the life of the Mission. Father Lechert never came back to London and from 21 June 1903 Father Cichocki started to use the title Rector of the Polish Mission. At this time the Polish community lost

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Z.S. Siemaszko, *Biskup wileński (1918-1925) Matulewicz*, Kultura, Paris, t.441/1988, p. 28.

the church in Cambridge Road. Father Lechert had bought the property in 1896 in his own name, but, needing the money for his work in France and Rome, he authorized a certain priest called Father Wojtas to sell it on his behalf to the French Mission in London. A temporary Polish chapel was established in the house of the well-known benefactress of the Polish community, Mrs Zofia Pace. Although the community was beset with many problems at that time, the year 1903 was favourable in that Father Cichocki had a good number of Polish priests ready to help in the pastoral work in London; these were Fathers Jan Dihm, Leon Morawski, Bolesław Osadnik and Jan Nowak. In 1904 Father Cichocki had to perform the duties on his own, and some time after 2 October he left the country. With his departure the work of the Missionaries of Divine Love, brought to London by Father Lechert, was terminated. The Sisters of the Holy Family, associated in the past with the Polish Mission, also cut their ties, moving their house to Enfield where they ran a diocesan boarding school.⁹²

The new Rector of the Mission, Father Grzegorz Domański, a Salesian, transferred the chapel to a Polish school in Patriot Square, Bethnal Green, in London's East End. He celebrated the first Mass there on 22 December 1904, but in a very short time it became obvious that the chapel was very inconveniently situated. Decisive action was called for, as a church and accommodation for two priests were a necessity since Father Domański now had an assistant priest, Father Bujara. Fortunately, Father Domański found and rented out an old sailors' hostel in Mercer Street, Shadwell, which, after some alterations, was adapted to the needs of the Polish Mission. In 1905 the Polish Catholic Mission in London possessed for the first time in one house a church, a priest's quarters, a library, a small school and even a modest theatre. Nevertheless, as the property was rented, it did not give the community the stability it desired.

In January 1906 Father Domański left the country and Father Bujara took over, becoming the new Rector of the Mission. His curate was a young priest, Father Julian Solarz. After the departure of Father Solarz in October 1908, he was replaced by Father Aleksander Kotula and in 1910 by Father Franciszek Langer.

After the death of Card. Vaughan in 1903, his successor, Card. Bourne, was sympathetically disposed to the Polish priests and their community, and assisted them in their efforts for stability in the work of the Polish Mission. He approved the plan to build a new church and on 6 February 1905 authorized Count Łubieński and Mr Henryk Pace, a London solicitor, to raise money for this purpose. The team was neither enthusiastic nor successful and the flow of money was rather slow. On 6 December 1911, Mr Pace, the Treasurer of the Building Committee, died, and the activity of the Committee almost ceased.

⁹² *The Catholic Directory*, London, 1906, p. 130; 1907, p. 132.

This caused general dissatisfaction among members of the community and a Public Meeting was organized on 14 April 1912 when the matter was discussed at some length.

Quite possibly, this difficult situation accelerated the departure of Father Bujara, who, on 6 September 1913, left Britain. The new Rector of the Mission was Father Jan Symior and from the start he had to face all the problems his community had been battling with for many years. In October 1913 a Public Meeting decided that they would not wait indefinitely for a suitable church and centre, so a new Building Committee, composed of fifteen members of the community, was elected, whose duty it was to look for a plot of land big enough for a church, a priest's house, a school, a library and a parish hall. Also serving on the Committee were Father Symior and the architect responsible for the plans for the new building. The Archbishop approved everything on one condition: before starting the building work £4,000 had to be deposited in the Diocese.

Raising the money now met with greater success and by the end of 1913 the Committee's account contained £3,00; £500 were allocated to pay the tenancy of the Mercer Road house, but this was soon replaced by a four hundred pound loan. Furthermore, Mrs Zofia Pace donated some valuable and suitable land.

A sign of this new community spirit was the formation of the Polish Benevolent Society which began to work in co-operation with the Mission on 2 January 1914.

Suddenly, a mighty cataclysm put a stop to everything. The First World War paralysed the British Isles and all building plans were frozen for the time of war on government orders. All the money which had been collected was deposited in the Archbishop's office. New sums were slowly added to this amount in the hope of a speedy end to the war.

If war put a stop to plans for building a centre, it did not extinguish the spiritual and social life of the community. In October 1915 a small Polish school was set up, and about the same time a new Polish Catholic White Eagle Society began its activities. On 11 February 1916 *The Times* published an article stating that a new Polish Centre in London had come into existence and appealed for donations for a new Polish church, for which £2,000 were urgently needed. This more diversified and active religious and social life in the Polish community was a good preparation for the problems facing them in the future.

The first of the problems created by the war was that of prisoners of war. During the war Poles were fighting on many fronts in the Prussian, Russian and Austrian armies. The prisoner of war camps in Great Britain held a certain percentage of Polish prisoners. It was a hard task to explain to the British authorities the social and political consequences of the division of Poland and the enslavement of a whole nation forced to fight in a World War

against its own will and on both sides of the warring powers. Father Symior was able to do this successfully and obtained permission to visit POW camps. He regularly visited camps in Alexandra Palace and Feltham and periodically in Clay Hill and Potters Bar. He also visited Polish prisoners of war on the Isle of Man in the Knockhalve and Douglas camps, ministering to them as a Polish Catholic priest. His duties included the celebration of Mass with Polish sermons, confessions, organizing religious instruction, Rosary devotions and even three-day retreats. He was able to invite a number of priests to help him on special occasions: Father B. Andruszko, T. J. was a Retreat Master, Father Ziętara S. C. was an occasional preacher, and Canon Dukalski was an occasional Confessor. The proof of his priestly standing in London was his invitation to Father Matulajtis, a Lithuanian priest, to assist him as Confessor in certain cases. This move was well received. His indomitable spirit conquered all difficulties caused by camp officers or local Catholic chaplains. The effectiveness of his work was shown by the numbers of prisoners using his spiritual services.⁹³

The second problem was caused by the influx of a considerable number of Polish wartime immigrants. The growing Polish community now included certain dynamic persons whose activities in Britain, as well as in other European countries, formed to some extent opinions and trends in the mother country. Among these were Roman Dmowski, August Zaleski, Ignacy Paderewski, Jan Horodyski, M. Seyda, E. Piltz, J. Retinger and A. Tarnowski.⁹⁴ The energy and effectiveness of this activity can be seen in the number of new Polish organizations formed at this time, about sixteen in all.⁹⁵ To avoid the resultant competition and unnecessary duplication of the same functions, close contact between these groups was called for. Thus the Polish Mission, the Polish Society and the Polish Centre (Ognisko), the three strongest Polish organizations, called a Public Meeting in May 1917 to found the Association of Polish Organizations in Britain.

The need for a permanent Polish church was now becoming more evident as, with the growth of the community and a surge in national feelings, certain religious celebrations of a patriotic flavour had to be held in English churches of a size appropriate to the growing congregation. For instance, the centenary of the death of the Polish hero Tadeusz Kościuszko was celebrated by the Poles in London on 16 October 1917 in the Church of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception in Farm Street, Westminster.

The standard of living of the Poles had now improved. The decline of the working population during the war caused an acute shortage of workers in

93 *Polska Misja Katolicka, Sprawozdanie Ks. Rektora J. Symiora*, pp. 50-51.

94 Norman Davies, 'The Poles in Great Britain, 1914-1919', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, 1972, p. 85.

95 *Ibid.*, pp. 86-88.

many places and gave everybody the chance of a decent job. Polish problems were now discussed in the national papers. Furthermore, the end of the war revived old dreams about their own Polish church. At the beginning of 1919 the Catholic weekly *The Universe* printed a plea by the Rector of the Polish Mission, Father Symior, for financial help in this endeavour. However, the creation of an independent and free Polish state in 1918 and inflation in post-war Britain delayed the cherished plans for many years.

The emergence of the Polish Republic attracted many members of the Polish community. They returned to their mother country in great numbers, thus in a short time diminishing the Polish population in Britain to such an extent that some of the Polish organizations ceased to exist. Those who remained kept in close contact with their friends and with life in Poland. The Polish Mission mirrored the attitudes of its parishioners. Hence, in 1920, when the Soviet army invaded the new Polish Republic and threatened its existence, prayers for Poland were regularly said in the Polish church. On days commemorating Polish national anniversaries such as 3 May — Constitution Day — and 15 August, when the Polish army defeated the Bolsheviks, the Polish Mission organized days of prayer. 3 October was a day of prayer for Poland in unity with all the churches of the Westminster diocese; 11 November 1920 commemorated the second anniversary of a nation finally united after long years of slavery. The Polish Embassy was always represented at these ceremonies and all the meetings and services were organized in the rented house in Mercer Street. Embassy officials, however, showed little interest in plans to build a new church and a new centre. Moreover, the Mission was severely hit by inflation. Money raised in the past amounting to £4,000, was fast losing its value, making any building scheme impossible.

The lack of progress in London was balanced out in some way in Manchester. On 17 April 1921 Father Foltin, who some time previously had been the curate in London, bought and consecrated a Polish-Lithuanian church in Manchester.

In April 1921, the London community celebrated the introduction in Poland of a new Constitution, a peace treaty with the Bolsheviks and the restoration to the nation of an important part of Upper Silesia. On 20 December, in an act of symbolic spiritual union with the mother country, a funeral Mass was said following the tragic death of President Gabriel Narutowicz. On 16 July, the local bishop, His Lordship Bidwell, paid a pastoral visit to the Polish chapel.

On 8 October 1921 an important change occurred. Father Symior, who during the First World War was the life and soul of the Polish community in London and the provinces, ended his ministry there and left for Poland. His successor was Father Józef Wroński, also a member of the Salesian Congregation. Father Wroński appears to have suffered from poor health and seemed limited in his ability to perform all his duties effectively. On 14

January 1926 he died of a heart attack and was buried at the Salesian Cemetery in Burwash, Sussex. For a few months the Polish church in Mercer Street was under the care of English Salesians from Battersea.

In May of 1926, a new Polish priest, Father Teodor Cichos, became Rector of the Polish Mission. After some years of limited activity in the life of the Polish community in London, this new and energetic man speedily assessed the urgent needs of his parish. The Polish community in London differed from communities in Poland and in other countries. According to official statistics there were about thirty or even forty thousand Polish citizens in Great Britain,⁹⁶ but Father Cichos very soon discovered that the number of Catholics in these groups was small. Most of the Poles in the statistics were Polish Jews. Christian Poles constituted only ten to eleven per cent of the total.⁹⁷

British law made no distinction between citizenship and nationality and every British citizen notwithstanding his origin was endowed with British nationality. Similarly members of the former Polish Commonwealth had a right in Britain to claim Polish nationality without regard to their origin or religion. Father Cichos solved the problem of identifying the Catholics in this group by sending out a questionnaire in which he invited responses from the recipients, asked about their interest in the work of the Polish Catholic Mission in London and his pastoral activity. The number of positive answers was rather small — not exceeding a few hundred. This was consistent with the almost complete absence of social life in the community and the existence of only one Polish organization, 'The Polish Society in London', which was always in financial trouble and struggled for survival. There were no Polish newspapers or news-sheets of any kind to inform the Polish population of events in their area and maintain links between dispersed families. The well-off and well-educated Poles kept themselves apart, with few exceptions, from working men and women. The Polish community in London was in a state of disintegration and the Polish centre and church in Mercer street were also in a sad state of disrepair. Only huge investment and comprehensive refurbishment could save the building, but without the support of a strong community this was impossible. Father Cichos was able only to repaint the church, lay linoleum down on the floors and to carry out some small repairs. To pay the bills, he was frequently obliged to ask the Westminster diocese for help.

To embark on pastoral work against such odds a priest needed a deep faith coupled with commitment and strength of character. Father Cichos indeed possessed these qualities. His priority was to work for the children and the youth in the community, and the groups he organized for them attracted boys and girls as well as their parents.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.

⁹⁷ Zubrzycki, *Polish Immigrants*, p. 43.

A parish choir began regular meetings to rehearse Polish hymns and this soon bore fruit. After merely twelve weeks, at a Catholic procession organized by the English hierarchy, the Polish group with their priest attracted attention and was praised by the English Catholic community of London.⁹⁸ The considerable number of Poles who came to church on 26 August 1926, for the feast day of the Black Madonna of Czestochowa and the thanksgiving for the Victory in 1920 in the war against the Bolshevik army, was a hopeful sign of the revival of the community's spirit. On 5 September 1926 the *Przewodnik Katolicki*, a Polish paper from Poznań, printed Father Cichos's article about his experiences of life in England and about the problems of his community in London.⁹⁹ The church and pastoral centre remained the most urgent matter for his parishioners. Old dreams about the building of a new church were unrealistic now as inflation had raised the price of new buildings to such an extent that the £4,000 collected in the past was but a small fraction of the £20,000 now needed for the same work. However, there was one possibility: the acquisition of an old and redundant Protestant church deserted by its parishioners. Father Cichos was ready to fight for the future of his Mission, perceiving in its existence a vital factor unifying and healing the rifts in a migrant community in a new country.

The following year, 1927, showed the positive results of the new Rector's work. The community in the Polish parish was growing and was seen to take part in various celebrations. In June 1927 it was represented at a Catholic Procession at St Michael's Church, Commercial Road, E1, and in the same month on 18 June at Crystal Palace they were present at a ceremony in honour of the League of Nations. These signs of positive development of the parish helped the Archbishop of Westminster to come to an important decision: the Poles should build or buy a new church for their community.

By now, after years of idleness, the Polish Embassy was co-operating actively, represented by a member of the Polish Parliament, Minister Konstanty Skirmuntt. The old Committee had ceased to exist and in November 1927 a new Committee was formed. The Chairman was the Polish Consul General Mr Komierowski; members were Father Cichos, Rector of the Polish Mission, Mr B. Korewo, an official of the Polish Embassy, Mr W. Czarnomski, a representative of the Polish community in London, and Canon Carton de Wiart representing the local archbishop. The quality and social standing of every member of the Committee boded well for the future of the Mission.

On 24 May 1928 an eminent visitor from Poland, Card. Kakowski, Primate of Poland, accompanied by Bishop Przeździecki from Siedlce and Father Dr Mystkowski arrived in London. During the reception in the Polish

⁹⁸ *Polska Misja Katolicka*, pp. 23-24.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 22-24.

Embassy they met Card. Bourne, together with prominent representatives from the Westminster Diocese, English diplomats and members of the Polish community in London. On Sunday 27 May Mass was celebrated in the Polish church and they saw for themselves the dilapidated state of the Polish Mission in Mercer Street. The interest they showed in the religious life of their countrymen in London and in the work of the Polish Catholic Mission impressed Card. Bourne and encouraged the Committee to move towards the realization of their goals.

However, in a country where emphasis is placed on practicalities, idealistic plans for the building of a new church were doomed to repeated setbacks. The Polish community had in the past saved £4,000 but in the meantime inflation had diminished the value of the pound. Mrs Pace, a benefactor of the Parish, offered a piece of valuable land to the Mission for a new church, but the above-mentioned capital did not represent even one quarter of the amount necessary for a new building. The Committee was also burdened, under the terms of the lease, with commitments to renovate the old building in Mercer Street when leaving the site for good. The two institutions and guarantors of the work, the Westminster diocese and the Polish Embassy, could not offer any financial support. The Committee at that time was not able to find any way out of the hopeless situation.

Suddenly the coincidence of two events changed everything. First an unexpected opportunity to buy a redundant Swedenborgian church in Devonia Road, Islington, presented itself. The property whose real value was about £20,000, was for sale to a Christian denomination for only £4,000. It was an amazingly providential purchase for a community owning no more than the required £4,000. The second event was the sale of a property that had been donated to the Parish by Mrs Pace. The treasurer of the committee received £1,239 for the sale of the plot of land, enough to pay for repairs to the old building in Mercer Street. Comprehensive and costly refurbishment of the house was now not expected because, by a decision of the council, the house was condemned as unsuitable for human habitation and ordered to be demolished in the near future.

In February 1930, the legal formalities had been finalized and the Polish community in London became the new owner of the former Swedenborgian church in Islington. The cleaners and painters started work at once and in two months' time a small chapel in the church was adapted to the Catholic liturgy. By May 1930 the Polish community was able to use the chapel while watching the progress of work in the main aisle of the church.

Preparations for the consecration of the church were soon well advanced. The Polish Embassy was also fully involved in all the works. Together with the Rector of the Polish Mission, the Embassy invited Cardinal Primate August Hlond from Poland and the Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Bourne, for the solemn consecration of the church.

On 10 October 1930 Card. Hlond arrived in London and on 11 October he attended a reception at the Embassy. On 12 October the church was consecrated by Cardinal Hlond as Our Lady of Czestochowa and St Casimir's Polish Church.

Thirty-six years after the establishment of the Polish Catholic Mission the community had acquired its own church and presbytery. It was a fine achievement for the Polish community in London yet this was but the beginning of an immense effort to keep the building and of course the Mission itself up to the desired standard. The structure of the church needed to be strengthened. The provisional repairs were not long-lasting so the church had to be totally repainted. The enormous windows were rotten to such an extent that replacement was a necessity. There was an urgent need to rewire all electrical installations. The heating was not working and repairs or replacements of some parts were essential. All this work urgently needed a large sum of money and the burdens of planning the work and paying for it lay on the shoulders of Father Cichos alone.

Furthermore, one should remember that care of the financial and practical problems of the Mission was but one part of the Polish rector's duties. Another was the care of the sick, the old, children and the Poles attending the church regularly, and one may say with considerable justification that Father Cichos worked with unusual enthusiasm and energy and did his best to tackle and solve all the problems.

Over the next years, work on the preservation of the church was continuous. The main structure of the church was improved, old windows were replaced by new ones, and the church was repainted. The rewiring of electric cables was completed and the heating system was repaired. The money needed to cover all these expenses was raised with ingenious skill or borrowed from the Bishop, which frequently required great humility and patience. Bills, although not always paid on time, were always settled by Father Cichos. His honesty and ability to solve the financial problems, in spite of tremendous and almost insurmountable difficulties, caused him to be held in high esteem by all builders and contractors working in the Mission, some even congratulating him publicly on his excellent qualities.

Father Cichos also took care of his parishioners with great zeal and sensitivity, being always ready to visit the sick and the elderly. Moreover, from the beginning, he was particularly concerned about the children. On 27 May 1935 a small Polish school for Polish children was opened at the Mission. In the beginning only eleven children started to learn the Polish language, yet the school still exists now in 1992. All national occasions, anniversaries and festivals were duly celebrated in the church. Social life flourished and in 1932 the new Polish Catholic Society, founded by Father Cichos, started its charitable work among the Polish migrants in London. About the same time

the Polish Students Society and the Anglo-Polish Society came into existence with the encouragement of Father Cichos.

Eminent persons, both Polish and English, visited the Polish Mission in London. In November 1931 Ignacy Paderewski came and in May 1932 the mayors of certain Polish cities: Cyryl Ratajski (Poznan), Leon Barcikowski (Gniezno) and Dr Adam Kocur (Katowice) visited the Mission together with their Counsellors. On 6 November 1932 Bishop Butt from Westminster came to the Polish church and on 3 January 1933 Cardinal Hlond arrived in London from Poland, for the funeral of Card. Bourne. Poles were also usually represented at special ceremonies organized by the Westminster Diocese such as the Corpus Christi procession or at carol services.

The Polish community led by their priest was very much alive and, on the whole, well-regarded in the neighbourhood. The imagination and openness of the Poles, their readiness to 'work hard and play hard', together with their generosity, won them many friends. However, no doubt this annoyed certain people of a different culture and even caused jealousy.

How else can one explain the rule, almost forced on Father Cichos by the church administration, at around the beginning of the 1930s, to close permanently the front door of the church, and admit parishioners to the church only through the small and narrow 'kitchen door', leading to the basement beneath the church and from there up the narrow steps to the church itself? Father Cichos fiercely resisted this enforcement, but the formal document, which was signed by officials of the Westminster diocese and acknowledged by Father Cichos, divided the community from the outside world by a set of strict rules. They had to stay in a ghetto against their own will.

The rules and conditions were as follows:

1. That it be clearly understood that the Chapel is for the special and exclusive use of Catholics of Polish nationality, and is not a Polish [Catholic] church for the general use of the faithful of other nationalities.
2. That access to the Chapel remain as it is at present, i.e. directly from the street, or strictly speaking from the Courtyard, but that a tablet shall be apposed on each side of the street entrance to the effect that the Chapel is for the special and exclusive use of Catholics of Polish nationality and is not a church for the public use of the faithful of other nationalities. The verbal text of this advertisement to be arranged with the Rector of St. John's. The Rector of the Polish Mission will undertake to explain the above verbally on several recurrent occasions to his flock so as to prevent the Chapel from being looked upon as a public church.
...With regard to the administration of the Sacraments of Baptism and Matrimony the General Canonical rules should be applied, i.e. that these Sacraments are to be regularly administered in the Parish church of the recipients according to the domicile. Should one of them wish to receive either of these Sacraments in a different place, or administered by a Priest other than the Parish Priest,

application is to be made for permission to the competent Ecclesiastical authorities.¹⁰⁰

After the issue of the above document the sign: 'THIS CHURCH IS INTENDED SOLELY FOR POLES' was fixed to the wall of the church of Our Lady of Czestochowa and St Casimir.¹⁰¹ Such restrictions were not extended to the French or German churches in London and these limitations were apparently 'intended solely for Poles'.

After ten years of work in London, the stress which Father Cichos suffered as well as the humiliating problems mentioned above rendered his stay in the Polish Mission almost intolerable. His considerable qualities of character, which earned him the gratitude of his parishioners and made him so successful in his work, gave him negligible social standing in British society or even in the Catholic Church in the British Isles. He was a member of a religious order and as such, in some ways, on the bottom rung of the local hierarchy and thus easily hurt.

Father Cichos felt that the Polish Mission in London should be in charge of a person who had the support of important church dignitaries. So, his religious Superiors turned to the best person they could find: Cardinal August Hlond, Primate of Poland. He understood the complex pastoral situation and promised to send to London a priest whom he trusted and whom he was ready to support in case of difficulties.

With great sadness and gratitude for his hard and fruitful work, the Polish community and Polish Embassy bade Father Cichos farewell. On 19 July 1938 the Polish Ambassador in Great Britain, Count E. Raczynski, decorated him with the Polish Silver Order of Merit, while 28 August 1938 was the day of farewell in the Polish church. Members of the Polish community representing all groups and organizations, including the Polish Ambassador, adults and children, were present in the church for solemn Mass and later at a reception in the hall. There were speeches, songs, poetry readings by the children and personal expressions of respect and love. The official farewell speech was made by the new young Polish rector, former secretary of Cardinal Hlond, Father Władysław Staniszewski, who, sent by the Cardinal, fortunately arrived in London in time. And so this very important chapter in the history of Poles in London ended.

Conclusion

The establishment of a Polish Mission in London was the result of long pastoral experience together with pressure from the Embassy and Polish organizations. Sixty years previously the first large group of Polish and

¹⁰⁰ The Document was signed 19 February 1930.

¹⁰¹ Data given to the author by Mgr. W. Staniszewski.

Lithuanian Catholics started life in Great Britain. They courageously faced all the various hardships awaiting newcomers and adapted themselves well. Adapting to religious life in local Catholic churches, however, was somewhat more difficult for them. Wherever possible and probably to the surprise of the local bishop and his clergy, they tended to have a separate, Polish- and Lithuanian-speaking priest and their encouragement of local Irish or English priests to learn Polish was not too popular. One option remained: to respond positively to their requests and let them organize life in their own parish, naming it the Polish Catholic Mission. Financial care for the Mission was transferred also to members of the community.

Happily, during the first ten years of its existence the Mission was supported by a strong team of Polish Sisters. The presence of the Sisters, visiting families, the sick and the elderly and taking care of the children, laid the pattern for future work in the Mission. In spite of their later departure to Enfield where they formed a diocesan school, the Polish priests were always grateful for their presence and influence in Parish life.

The period 1914-18, when there was an influx of new and gifted Poles who took an active part in the life of the community, inspired many to enter Polish organizations. This was a mixed blessing because shortly after the re-establishment of the Polish state in 1918, about 2,000 of the most industrious Poles left London for good to settle permanently in Poland.¹⁰² The new and important factor in Polish life in London was now the Polish Embassy, which needed a church for special functions. The Embassy's contact with Cardinal Bourne doubtlessly helped the Mission to acquire its own church.

One must note that it was the worst possible time to finalize such a deal, bearing in mind the financial depression in the country and a depleted community after the post-war exodus of Poles from England. Furthermore, the sum of money raised over many years had now depreciated in value. Nevertheless, persistent demands over the years, the apparent spiritual strength of a long established community, together with the support and influence of the Polish Embassy, and finally the presence of a very active and determined priest, namely Father Cichos, eventually bore the long awaited fruit.¹⁰³

102 Zubrzycki, *Polish Immigrants*, p. 43.

103 The table printed below presents the names of priests serving the Polish community in the years 1894-1938.

Year	Name	Number of Poles in G.B.
1894	Mgr Wincenty Bronikowski	3,500
1895	Fr Stanisław Królikowski	
1895	Rr Anthony Lechert	
1896	Rr Józef Schroeter	

The Problem of National Identity

The subject of this section is very complex and cannot be fully explored in a volume in which the main object of study is religion in the life of Polish exiles. An examination of the problem of national identity is essential, however, for an understanding both of the attitudes and actions of Polish exiles, and of the traditional links between religion and national feeling.

Without going into theoretical considerations about the objective factors in the formation of a nation, one accepts here the subjective feeling of national identity in a person’s consciousness as the distinctive sign of belonging to a nation.¹⁰⁴ This concept becomes clearer when we review the life of an individual.

The proposed person, well known today, is Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński (*1901-81).

Sources of Motivation

Stefan Wyszyński was born on 3 August 1901 in the small village of Zuzela, on the borders of Podlasie and Mazowsze, where his father was an organist in a local church and his mother a housewife. This part of partitioned Poland was

1896	Fr Józef Albertini	
1896	Rr Tomaz Przybylski	
1896	Rr Ludwik Wojtys	
1897	Rr Bakanowski	
1899	Fr Władysław Bajerowicz	
1900	Fr Alojzy Foltin	3,200
1902	Fr Henryk Cichocki	
1903	Fr Jan Dihm	
	Fr Leon Morawski	
	Fr Bolesław Osadnik	
	Fr Jan Nowak	
1904	Fr Grzegorz Domański	
1904	Fr Bujara	
1906	Fr Julian Solarz	
1908	Fr Aleksander Kotula	
1910	Fr Franciszek Langer	3,500
1913	Fr Jan Symior	
	Rr B. Andruszko T.J.	
	Rr Ziętara S.C.	
	Canon Dukalski	
	Fr Matulajtis	
1921	Rr Józef Wroński	3,800
1926	English Salesians	
1926	Rr Teodor Cichos	
1938	Rr Wladyslaw Staniszewski	4,500

(Taken from Zubrzycki, *Polish Immigrants*, p. 47. The figures given represent the approximate number of Christian Poles in England and Wales. The Poles in Scotland adds approximately 700-1,500 to these numbers.)

104 ‘Language and Nation’, Symposium, Warsaw-Krakow, 1987, pp. 161-62.

under Russian rule. The political situation of the country had a minimal effect on family life and so he had a secure and stable home. The home was the centre of all important events for the family. There he learned his mother tongue, traditional songs, stories and poetry which engendered in him a respect and love of God, the Church, his motherland and all human life.

Language was an important factor uniting him with Polish culture and through it with the Polish nation.

The home, his parents and his sisters provided him with a model of love in a Christian family. The authority of the parents was unassailable. Respect for God's law, His church and all Creation was shown at all times. For instance, a small piece of bread which might fall on the floor was respectfully kissed. Regard for parents and the elderly was publicly shown by humbly kissing their hand.

As a member of a small community Stefan was involved in the colourful celebrations of village feasts and church festivals.

School on the contrary was an unhappy place. It was a Russian school and the Russian teacher was very strict, forbidding the use of the Polish language in class. There were tensions and clashes in the school. After one such clash with the teacher, young Stefan was ordered to leave the school, which he did and never came back. He completed his education privately in his own home, passing all the necessary state exams. This experience showed him the real need for freedom and independence for an enslaved nation. The feeling was further reinforced a few years later after an equally bitter experience, when, as a Polish boy scout, he was humiliated and beaten by Prussian soldiers.

In 1920 at a moment of great danger for the newly resurrected Poland, he was ready as a young Seminarian to enter the army and fight against the Bolsheviks attacking Warsaw. The bishop, however, dissuaded him from this decision stating that his country needed courageous soldiers on many different fronts. The urgent appeal which Cardinal Kakowski made to the nation in 1920 to defend Poland and fight for 'God and the Mother Country' deeply affected the sensitive soul of the young boy and became the principal idea guiding his entire life.¹⁰⁵

In 1924 he was ordained a priest in the town of Włocławek. His great interest in the Christian life of the city and rural areas of Poland was enhanced by university study. He became well acquainted with contemporary sociology, and later, during his trips abroad in the years 1929-31, with social and industrial union movements in Europe. He studied with great interest the works of lawyers, philosophers, theologians, writers, Polish Messianists and other outstanding individuals who were involved deeply in the work and struggle for Poland between the fourteenth century and present times. In his work one may see neothomistic influences, and in his social teaching he came

¹⁰⁵ Andrzej Micewski, *Kardynał Wyszyński Prymas i Mąż Stanu*, Paris, 1982, p. 23.

close to St Augustine's views, and later, to contemporary Christian personalism.¹⁰⁶ He was not, however, a theoretician, but rather a pragmatist ready to follow ideas once he had accepted them. In his pastoral work his knowledge and experience led to an involvement with working people in the thirties, the difficult years of the industrial depression. His prudence, coupled with the positive results of his endeavours, resulted in promotion to a very important post. Shortly before the outbreak of World War II, Cardinal Hlond nominated him to the 'Primate of Poland's Social Council', which had the task of formulating and implementing agricultural reforms and the division of large private estates among the small farmers. In addition to these specialized and highly responsible activities, he had teaching duties in a theological college.

This close association with working people and those in need gave him a good preparation for the approaching war and the human problems of that time. During the war, pursued by the Gestapo, he changed his place of residence and became a chaplain in the institution for the blind at Laski, near Warsaw. His main duties there brought him into contact with the Polish intelligentsia from Warsaw, organizing lectures and conferences for them as well as for young people flocking to Laski for much-needed prayer, discussions about their urgent problems and their need for spiritual help in this desperate situation. At that time, he became a chaplain of the underground Polish army (*Armia Krajowa*).

His dedicated work for God, his country and the people led to his being promoted to ever more responsible duties. After the end of the war he became Bishop of Lublin and so in 1946, at the age of forty-five, he was the youngest bishop in Poland. Three years later, after the mysterious death of Cardinal August Hlond, Bishop Stefan Wyszyński was nominated the Primate of Poland.

As a mature man he clearly saw all the elements which had moulded his life in the past. In his writings and speeches he crystallized his views on all these subjects.¹⁰⁷

The Value of the Human Person

For Stefan Wyszyński the person is at the centre of the world. It is the most important creation in the universe, a microcosm. The whole world is understood and enclosed in human thought. Therefore, from the beginning of his existence, the individual has a right to special care within the family, the nation and also the state. It is the duty of a nation, a state and also the church to serve people. The individual is endowed by God with great dignity and a mission. People working in different fields of civilization and culture, within

¹⁰⁶ C.S. Bartnik, *Życ w słowie*, Warsaw, 1983, p. 103.

¹⁰⁷ Norman Davies, *God's Playground*, Vol. II, p. 18. See four sources of inspiration: 'Church, Language, History, Race'.

their personal and well-understood callings, develop and change life for the better for the whole human race.

To fulfil his mission a man is entitled to certain rights. These include the right to truth, to love and justice, to equal opportunities in social life; the right to practise a chosen profession and adhere to a cultural grouping; the right to freedom of thought and of religion; the right to life itself, to enjoy a decent standard of living, the right of moral, cultural, industrial or other values of one's own nation and of the whole human family; the right to form a family, to follow one's own way of life, to freedom of association and to use all legitimate means necessary to a full realization of one's own personality.¹⁰⁸

The Family

The family is the first and most important unit of humanity, but it is not a biological or psychological and economic unit only. Instituted by God, it has a special mission: to take care of the most precious creature in the world — the human being.

Within the family the new-born child is introduced to the real world, and there also the child encounters God.

The family consists of the father, mother and child. To exist and flourish, the structure of the family must be hierarchical: the head of the family, unifying the unit, responsible for it, and legally leading it is the Father. The Mother is in the forefront of family life through her love. She extends her love in the first place to her husband and children.

Stefan Wyszyński grew up full of love for his father, mother and his sisters. He learned from them how to love others and all his life he was grateful for the happiness with which this love enriched his life.

The mother in his family (as in other Polish families) was also:

the chief factor in the preservation of the Polish tongue and tradition in the days when to speak Polish and to teach Polish history was a crime; she was a mainstay of religion, and an active participant in social welfare work; she was a strong moral force acting in support of the man.¹⁰⁹

The role of the Polish mother in the family was so powerful that, during the last war, the Germans were warned not to marry Polish girls because they had never been assimilated by the Russians in the previous century and, though they may marry a German, they would probably maintain and pass on Polish traditions to the children.¹¹⁰

108 Ks. Jerzy Lewandowski, *Naród w nauczaniu kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego*, Warsaw, 1982, p. 44.

109 Paul Super, *The Polish Tradition. An Interpretation of a Nation*, London, 1939, p. 131.

110 G.B. Foreign Office, *Weekly Political Intelligence Summaries*, No. 69, 29 January 1941, p. 6.

The family is so important for the human race that all other groups and organization should nurture it. The nation, and equally the state, has a duty to care for and serve the family. The family is the Promised Land and the hope of a better future for humanity.

The Poles, divided as a nation up to 1918 by three powers, had a difficult task to perform: to keep their own Polish identity and to maintain their existence under foreign rule.¹¹¹ The main bastion saving them from the influence of their enemies and maintaining their own traditions was the family.

The Family of Families: the Nation

The shadow of the Second World War is still quite visible today and makes us aware of the ideology which inspired Hitler to aggression and to starting the war — nationalistic ideology.

The nation itself is often considered in Poland and elsewhere to be a natural form of society and its existence is indispensable to the harmonious growth and development of a human being. In the etymological sense the nation is a large community of persons of common origin (Greek *genos*, Latin *-natio*). There is nothing pejorative in the above definition. On the contrary:

the word 'nation' is linked to great causes, deep feelings, memorable achievements, a zest for life, patriotism, social life, the drama of past events, a sense of duty to the nation, national poetry, and weighty matters of life and death. However, the same word may conjure up ideas of nationalism, passion, chauvinism, fanaticism, xenophobia, and various utopian social programmes.¹¹²

The word nationalism has recently fallen into disrepute, as a result of its historical association with the chauvinism of the last decades and especially with the use of the word by Hitler and the Nazi party. The Judaeo-Christian tradition shows us the origin and special place of the nation in the providential plans of God. God elected and endowed the Jewish nation with a mission important to all mankind: the salvation of humanity. Within Christianity, in turn, every nation in its history fulfils its own mission.

So the nation is very important to the development and progress of the whole of humanity. In this sense the idea of a nation is so precious that the words said by Horace twenty-one centuries ago, *dulce et decorum est pro patria mori* — the beauty and seemliness of dying for one's country in

¹¹¹ Stefan Kieniewicz, *Historyk a świadomość narodowa*, Warsaw, 1982 (hereafter *Historyk a świadomość narodowa*), p. 333.

¹¹² Ks. Czesław Bartnik, *Polska teologia narodu*, Lublin, 1988, pp. 7, 21.

defence of the nation — are remembered and taught to the young even today.¹¹³

To understand in which way this Christian idea of nationhood was distorted by German nationalism, one must return to the year 1918. But first, the definition of nationalism:

It is an ideology and sentiment that involves the commitment of the individual's secular loyalty to the nation-state.¹¹⁴

It is a desire for national independence ... political freedom and democratic Government ... national individuality and aggrandisement as in Nazi Germany.¹¹⁵

Devotion to one's nation; a policy of national independence ...¹¹⁶

It is a socio-political attitude and ideology, giving priority to the interests of one's own nation, expressed by national egoism, discrimination, intolerance and hostility to the other nations.¹¹⁷

After the First World War Germany was defeated and humiliated, and, in the view of many, betrayed by politicians. National pride was deeply wounded. The deep resentment and need of re-affirmation of national dignity was exploited by German nationalists and the Nazi Party of Adolf Hitler. The humiliation of the nation-state should be wiped out by unlimited loyalty to the nation-state.¹¹⁸ Nationalism became an absolute value in itself. This was the essential point of nationalism:

'No higher ideal than the welfare of ... the nation', 'nothing in this world surpasses ... Germany' — such slogans were on the lips of not only Hitler and his party propagandists, but of many academics in Germany, and not least, certain philosophers and Protestant theologians during the late 1920s and early 1930s.¹¹⁹

Through their works they all laid the foundation of a rational basis for the development and propagation of Nazi views.

Beside the cult of the nation, a similarly important place was reserved for the 'race'. The Germans were seen as *Übermenschen*, the Supermen, all other races were of course *Untermenschen*, humans of a lower order. They were so

¹¹³ Keith W. Clements, *A Patriotism for Today*, London, 1986, p. 38: 'Most of us assume country to mean the sovereign nation-state such as we live in ...'.

¹¹⁴ *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, London, 1974, *Micropaedia*, Vol. VII, p. 213.

¹¹⁵ *New English Dictionary*, London, 1959, p. 671.

¹¹⁶ *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford, 1986, p. 1386.

¹¹⁷ *Słownik Języka Polskiego*, II, p. 243.

¹¹⁸ L. Czornaja and D. Mielnikow (eds), *Adolf Hitler, Studium zbrodni*, Warsaw, 1988 (hereafter *Adolf Hitler*), p. 35.

¹¹⁹ Keith W. Clements, *A Patriotism for Today*, London, 1988, pp. 45-46.

insignificant in Nazi ideology that killing them was viewed by some Germans as a cleansing process, good for the health of humanity. The moral problems were solved by following the concept of a 'master morality' which has a different attitude to the question of life and death from 'slave morality' — the morality of the Christian civilization. Crimes against humanity, the mass killing of the Jews and other nations, were the result of these beliefs.

The ideas of the supremacy of the German race over other races, and the imagined right to 'living space' for the development of Germany, gave the Germans sufficient justification for all their aggressive acts during the last war.¹²⁰ The danger of nationalistic ideology was increased by linking it to the German state and its totalitarian power — 'Ein Volk — ein Reich — ein Führer'.¹²¹

Bearing in mind the main ideas behind such a pathological nationalism, one realizes that there may also exist a form of nationalism where the accent is on devotion to one's nation, and which is of benefit to society and humanity in general.

A number of Polish sociologists working on the problem of nationhood with greater interest than their Western colleagues, questioned for years the Western criteria by which a group of people has a right to call itself a nation. In contrast to the British view, for instance, which identifies the nation with the state, they rejected this interpretation.

According to their sociological theories, the nation was a cultural rather than a political community. The history of the nineteenth century when Poland was divided between three alien powers proved that national culture is a stronger and more binding element than the government and the state. The nation and state do not always coincide. Many young Polish sociologists, for example F. Znaniecki, J. S. Bystron, S. Ossowski, and historians accepted these findings and used them in their own work and research.¹²²

The Polish notion of nationalism differed also from Western definitions by reason of its strong ethical aspect. Nationalism in the Polish sense distanced itself from national egoism, which exalted the values of one's own nation and rendered one blind to its faults, demanding the right to special favours, and yet preaching intolerance and hatred towards others. Such negative values were rejected. However, the fight for the liberation of one's own nation from foreign powers was accepted and considered as a positive sign of devotion to one's country, but without the tendency to dominate other nations.¹²³ The

120 Alan Bullock, *Hitler — A Study in Tyranny*, London, 1988, pp. 389, 399, 407, 693, 701nn.

121 Czornaja and Mielnikow (eds), *Adolf Hitler*, p.180.

122 Stanisław Ossowski, *O Ojczyźnie i Narodzie*, Warsaw, 1984, p. 10.

123 PWN, *Słownik Języka Polskiego*, II, p. 243.

word nationalism was in reality fully replaced by love of one's country or in one word — patriotism.

Stefan Wyszyński, in his views about the function of culture in the origin and life of the nation, was close to the above-mentioned sociologists and historians. In his view culture was the total product of the material and spiritual development of the nation, enriched by centuries of history and passed on from generation to generation.¹²⁴

The Second World War showed him the strength of a national culture. The external, cruel occupation of a country which vanished from the maps of Europe in 1939 could not vanquish and destroy the Polish nation. Knowledge of the past gave him the strength to face the Communist takeover of the country in 1945. He considered the state to be optional, being an important institution only when it served the nation. The nation may exist, though, without the state if the national culture is strong enough to respond to and satisfy the needs of the population.

Polish culture, the culture of a nation which accepted the Gospel, was Christian and deeply immersed in religious thought based on the biblical image of the nation. In the Bible the nation is 'a Family of Families', securing suitable conditions for the growth of every family unit in its circle.

The process of growing includes not only the physical development of every man and woman, but also the intellectual and spiritual side of human life. Within a nation everybody is guided into developing the right attitudes to God and to other people.

The Jewish nation was chosen by God to bring salvation to all. The Polish nation, united with Christ through the sacrament of Baptism and strengthened by the sacrament of Confirmation, also felt itself to be endowed with a mission to bring salvation to other nations. Stefan Wyszyński was concerned about this particular duty of Poland as a nation. He realized the existence of this awareness of its responsibility throughout the history of Poland. Its defence of Christianity in Europe, sometimes without any political gain (for instance Sobieski's stand against the Turks), was evident proof of this. One should also bear in mind the battle cry of nineteenth-century Polish freedom fighters, *za naszą i waszą wolność* — 'for our freedom and yours'.

The baptized and confirmed nation grows spiritually through the power of the Body and Blood of Christ, offered in the liturgy of the Catholic Church.

The nation, however, is also tempted by evil and prone to sin and so constant penance and constant conversion are essential. Stefan Wyszyński was aware of the grave sins of the whole nation. Thus the celebration of the Millennium of Christianity in 1966 was preceded on Wyszyński's order, by nine preparatory years of meditation, prayer, missions and sermons in all parishes of the country. Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński was indeed the faithful

124 PWN, *Słownik Języka Polskiego*, I, p. 1083.

follower of his predecessors in nineteenth-century divided Poland, who worked for the moral regeneration of the nation.

Christ's suffering and death on the cross prepared the way for the resurrection. Resurrection of the nation would follow the nation's sufferings if the nation followed the teaching of Christ. The mother of Christ, Mary, the first Christian and a model for everyone, is the prime example of Christian virtues and protector of the Polish nation. Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, from his own spiritual experience during years of imprisonment, saw the power of prayer and the intercession of the Virgin Mary — venerated as Our Lady of Czestochowa, Queen of Poland.¹²⁵ These values appear to be accepted and cultivated by most Poles, although not always consciously, and contribute to their intellectual and spiritual formation.

Culture and History

The importance of culture has been previously mentioned. To Cardinal Wyszyński culture was the element defining Polish national identity.¹²⁶

In the tenth century, Christianity was introduced into the already existing spiritual and material culture of the nation. It became rooted in this culture and flourished, at the same time engendering a new vision of humanity and facilitating the gradual transformation of the nation into one guided by Christian values.

The character of Polish culture differs from the culture of neighbouring nations. It may seem surprising, yet true, that Poland was a watershed between two Byzantine Empires: Russia and Germany. Although placed in different parts of the globe and using different languages, these two nations, in the tenth century, were fashioned by similar Byzantine influences. Absolute power of the monarch, slavery, the violence of the rulers, and the church's subservience to the Kaiser or Tsar were common elements in both nations.¹²⁷

Even in the twentieth century it seems that Nazism and Communism, politically different yet structurally close, still maintained very strong autocratic influences.

In contrast to the attitudes in Russia and Germany, one may assess love of freedom as being a specific feature of the Polish national spirit, inspired by Catholic Christianity. Missions led by Polish missionaries showed a rather unusual attitude, at this particular time, towards non-Christians — bringing about conversions by conviction, not by force. Pawel Włodkowic, leading the Polish delegation to the Council of Constance in the fifteenth century, forcefully presented this question to the Council Fathers. According to

125 Andrzej Micewski, *Kardynał Stefan Wyszyński Prymas i Mąż Stanu*, Paris, 1982, pp. 141, 151nn, 198nn.

126 Davies, *God's Playground*, Vol. II; see p. 25nn.

127 V Kongres Teologów Polskich, *Chrześcijaństwo a kultura polska*, Lublin, 1988 (hereafter V Kongres Teologów Polskich), pp. 54-55.

Włodkowic, any political power must be exercised with the agreement of the people. Political power imposed by brute force only is illegal.¹²⁸

According to Polish historians, such ideas of pluralism, tolerance and persuasion were observed, more or less, in relations with Lithuanians, Russians, Ukrainians and Protestants.¹²⁹ In the Middle Ages Poland was the only European country without bloody religious wars.

The nation was also capable of effectively uniting in the face of danger to its existence. In the seventeenth century threats to the safety of Poland and to the values so appreciated by Poles brought about internal conflicts, which were to devastate the country. Religion, which had played an important part in unifying the nation and in the social life of the whole country, changed its character and became more private, devotional and merely skin-deep. The readiness to fight for freedom often turned to a defence of the abuse of freedom. The loss of national unity and spreading anarchy resulted in the decline of the Polish state and finally in the partition of the country by neighbouring powers. However, it is interesting to observe how the old values were slowly regenerated in the nation after it had been humiliated, decimated, taken over by foreigners and deprived of freedom, always taken for granted in the past.

Religion once more became a unifying power — unifying a divided nation, crossing borders, drawing people from all parts of the partitioned country, to certain sanctuaries holy to all Catholic Poles. Religion, furthermore, unified all classes of Poles. It helped to change the structure of society to a more just one and to heal the divisions between the rich and poor, the educated and the lower classes. It helped to reaffirm the culture and national identity of underprivileged classes. The moral life of many communities affected by vice and alcoholism was raised by the intense activity of many bishops and clergy. Religious practices, such as pilgrimages, the celebration of traditional feast days and devotions at Our Lady's Sanctuaries, criticized in the past as shallow and devoid of spiritual meaning, became sources of faith and a reaffirmation of Polish national identity.¹³⁰

Before the First World War a growing national consciousness and the activity of a new generation of politicians as well as writers, painters, musicians, poets and teachers, helped the nation to mature and prepare itself to fulfil its own destiny in the future.

The end of the First World War created favourable circumstances for resurrecting a country which for over a century had not existed. The ability to act quickly in times of need helped in the organization of elections, the unification of the education system, the formation of an army, the unification

128 *Ibid.*, p. 89.

129 *Ibid.*, p. 56.

130 *Ibid.*, p. 211.

of the legislature and creation of a National Health Scheme, one of the first in post-war Europe.

Standardization of various systems of administration, of railways and postal services were just a few of the problems the Poles solved in an extremely short time.

The church faced a similar task¹³¹ of harmonizing and unifying its structure within the country, both in administration and the education of the clergy. The introduction of new Canon Law in the Catholic church, about this time, was of great help. The new, young and gifted Primate of Poland, Cardinal August Hlond, was instrumental in the successful progress of this work. The new concordat, the active participation in the rural reform of the country and a new concept of permanent pastoral care for Poles abroad were also intensively promoted and in some instances personally supervised by Cardinal August Hlond.

Twenty years of independence brought out in the nation qualities which helped rebuild the social fabric of the country.

A resumé of the work of historical researchers¹³² presents the following positive values of the Poles: courage, involvement in political life, a sense of responsibility for nation and state, solidarity and a common front when facing friends or enemies, pride in being Polish and a love of freedom.¹³³ The researchers, however, failed to mention such values as loyalty to the family, to the Catholic church and to moral precepts.¹³⁴

The same research projects also gave ample examples of bad habits affecting Polish life: a disposition to indulge in quarrels, inflexibility and inability to compromise, lack of perseverance, no social discipline, emotional, unreliable in work, a tendency to criticize and complain.

However, the national culture, the influence of the church, centuries-old traditions and positive traits of character prevailed, keeping the nation together and, twenty years later, in a supreme test of patriotism, this new generation of Poles, born and educated in a free country, acquitted themselves with honour during the occupation of Poland in the Second World War.¹³⁵

131 Vide: Praca Zbiorowa, *Kościół w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, Lublin, 1981.

132 Grazyna Herczyńska, *Charakter narodowy w oczach historyków*, Kwartalnik Historyczny PAN, Warsaw, 1985/2, p. 390.

133 *Ibid.*

134 V Kongres Teologów Polskich, p. 57.

135 Kieniewicz, *Historyk a świadomość narodowa*, p. 168.

CHAPTER TWO

In Pursuit of Freedom. Religious Life during Attempts to Form a Polish Army Abroad (1939-40)

The beginning of the Second World War — 1 September 1939 — marks the beginning of the story of the Polish exiles, on which this work is based.

After a bloody struggle with the invading Germans, elements of the Polish army (numbering about 100,000 men),¹ on the order of their Commander-in-Chief, Marshal Śmigły-Rydz, issued on 18 September 1939, crossed into Romania, Hungary, Lithuania and Latvia. From there, they made their way in small groups to France or to Syria, then under French rule. Certain units of the Polish navy managed to reach British harbours.

The Polish Government also escaped from its beleaguered country to Romania and, in spite of guarantees of safe passage to France, was interned by the Romanian authorities. This resulted in a decision by the interned Polish President Ignacy Mościcki, within his special constitutional powers, to designate a successor, W. Raczkiewicz, who would be able to perform all presidential duties without hindrance.

On 30 September 1939 the new Head of State, President Raczkiewicz, took the oath of office in the Polish Embassy in Paris. On the same day General Władysław Sikorski was appointed Prime Minister, and on 7 November 1939 he became Commander-in-Chief of the Polish armed forces.

Poles residing in France, together with newly-arrived exiles, were recruited by General Sikorski into an 80,000-strong Polish armed force composed of 7,661 officers and 74,600 enlisted men, stationed mainly in France.² Former army chaplains and clergy called up by the war mobilization order helped to staff the newly-organized units with the requisite number of chaplains.

Religious life in the Polish army before the war reflected divisions throughout society as a whole. National minorities in Poland totalled nearly a third of the whole population, therefore a variety of cultures and differences

¹ Hans Roos, *A History of Modern Poland*, London, 1966, p. 168.

² Jerzy J Wiatr, *The Soldier and the Nation: The Role of the Military in Polish Politics, 1918-1985*, London, 1988, pp. 83-85.

in religious traditions were clearly visible.³ State legislation respected the religious rights of all citizens and each religious group in the army had a right to a specific number of chaplains. The decree of the Commander-in-Chief of the Polish army⁴ listed the following denominations:

- a) Catholics (of the Roman and Greek rite)
- b) Protestants of the Augsburg Confession, the United Confession, and the Reformed Confession
- c) Orthodox Christians
- d) Jews

The rank of the chaplains corresponded to their duties and responsibilities:

— in charge of the Roman Catholic Chaplaincy was a bishop with the rank of Lt General (General Dywizji), the dean in charge held the rank of Major General (Generał Brygady), a dean held the rank of Colonel, a parish priest that of Lieutenant Colonel, other chaplains held the rank of Major or Captain.⁵

— in the Protestant Chaplaincy the senior chaplain in charge held the rank of Colonel, the chaplain in charge of a parish was a Lieutenant-Colonel; others held the rank of Major or Captain.

— in the Orthodox Chaplaincy, the 'Protoprezbyter', in charge was a Colonel, the dean held the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel, other chaplains held the rank of Major or Captain.

— in the Jewish Chaplaincy the Rabbi in charge held the rank of Colonel, a Rabbi of the First Class was a Lieutenant-Colonel, a Rabbi of the Second Class was a Major, whereas a plain Rabbi was a Captain.⁶

The normal civil administration of the Roman Catholic Church is territorial. Large territorial units called dioceses, each with a bishop in charge, are divided into smaller units called deaneries and these again are subdivided into parishes with parish priests and curates staffing them. Central to a parish is the parish church, the venue for any religious activity and special occasions such as baptisms, marriages and funerals. Pastoral work in the Polish army was concentrated in the Garrison church, or 'kościół garnizonowy' which was attached not to a territorial diocese but to an army unit. The parishioners were all personally connected in some way with the army.

An army parish, therefore, was not a territorial unit but a personal one. The Catholic chaplain, due to his status as a priest and lower ranking officer, was under the jurisdiction of his own army bishop.

³ Norman Davies, *God's Playground*, p. 404.

⁴ Dekret Naczelnego Wodza, *Dziennik Rozkazów Wojskowych*, No. 32, poz.643, z dnia 13 lipca 1922.

⁵ Janusz Odziemkowski, Ks. B. Spychała, *Duszpasterstwo Wojskowe w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, R.V, p. 73. *Struktura organizacyjna duszpasterstwa wojskowego*, Statut Duszpasterstwa Wojskowego.

⁶ *Rocznik Oficerski 1932*, Ministerstwo Spraw Wojskowych, Warsaw, 1932, pp. 897nn.

In pre-war times, the number of army chaplains in the service of the different denominations was as follows: Roman Catholics, 190-200; Orthodox, c. 20; Protestants, 7, and Jewish, 16-18.⁷ The mobilization order of 1939 increased the number of Catholic priests in the army in response to the spiritual needs of the new recruits enlisted into the army. Whereas in peacetime the 300,000-strong army was served by about 200 Catholic priests, the mobilization brought the total number of soldiers to 1,000,000 and so the number of chaplains was probably increased to about 600. In September 1939 all of these, with their units, faced the enemy on the battlefield.

In the first weeks of the war fierce encounters with the enemy undertaken by certain army units were interrupted by an order from Marshal Śmigły-Rydz to cross over to friendly neighbouring countries. To the soldiers the reason for the order was clear: they were not escaping, merely moving to another theatre of operations in order to fight on after a short lull. Even so, the moment of departure was painful.⁸ General Dembinski was seen to kneel at the side of the road and kiss the ground on the Polish side of the border before giving his men the order to march into Hungary.⁹

Some Polish units, trusting in the promises of safe passage, crossed into Romania and Hungary with their armaments. The Tenth Cavalry Brigade moved into Hungary with all its artillery, together with a quantity of German armour, the spoils of a victorious battle. The German prisoners of war taken in battle were released before crossing over.¹⁰ In a short time, however, they had to surrender their arms and were sent to internment camps. The Polish Government, with a great number of Polish civilians who were ready to join a reorganized Polish army abroad, were also interned.

After almost three weeks of constant danger, the Poles, both physically and emotionally exhausted and interned in well-guarded camps, felt hopelessly defeated. Many accused the government and the higher ranks in the army of failing to prepare adequately for war. They also blamed the Allies, particularly Great Britain,¹¹ for failing to respond to the German aggression with concrete military aid.

However, they also felt a responsibility for the future of the country they had left. Thoughts about their homes, families, friends dead or alive, were constantly in their mind. Some were haunted by feelings of shame, calling on everybody in Poland to defend the country, hearing of their friends being killed and others fighting, while they themselves, although for the best possible reasons, were in the safety of Romania or Hungary. Shocked by personal, tragic experiences, the exiles lost touch with their friends. They

⁷ *Duszpasterstwo Wojskowe w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, p.194

⁸ Franciszek Skibinski, *Pierwsza Pancerna*, Warsaw, 1979 (hereafter *Pierwsza Pancerna*), p. 159.

⁹ Władysław Dec, *Narwik i Falaise*, Warsaw, 1972 (hereafter *Narwik i Falaise*), p. 12.

¹⁰ Skibinski, *Pierwsza Pancerna*, p. 12.

¹¹ *Pamiętniki Emigrantów 1879-1958*, Warsaw, 1960 (hereafter *Pamiętniki Emigrantów*), pp. 177, 178.

suffered great loneliness and, immersed in their own suffering, did not concern themselves with others.

Luckily, the Red Cross and different charitable committees (American, British, Hungarian-Polish), together with a well-organized Polish Committee in Romania, supported the exiles in the first months of their lives abroad. The Polish Embassy in Budapest, open until the end of 1940, was able to help those in need by paying them modest benefits. In Hungary, the Catholic chaplains, under the charge of Father Witosławski, organized a Polish Catholic Centre taking care of the pastoral needs of the exiles.¹² For some the experience was overwhelming. The *wojewoda* of Lwow, Dr Bilyk, overwhelmed by mounting problems, committed suicide in a moment of deep depression.¹³

In such desperate circumstances chaplains had an important task to perform. Religion was the only stabilizing element in people's lives. Mass celebrated by a Catholic chaplain was a memorable occasion uniting everybody in heartfelt prayer and bringing some peace of mind. In the Pauline church situated on the Mount of St Gellert in Budapest there was an altar of Our Lady of Czestochowa which helped those in grief to unite spiritually with their families in Poland. Marshal Śmigły-Rydz was seen to pray for a long time in front of this altar. Some time later he reminded his friends of the Masses celebrated in the small chapel in Hungary, the congregation spilling over into the park around it, as a time of heartfelt prayer.¹⁴ The priests accompanying the army units were the backbone of the pastoral structure which cared for the exiles in Hungary and Romania. The Polish Catholic Mission offered pastoral help to the needy. Some of the priests worked in close co-operation with the Polish leaders, Marshal Śmigły-Rydz or General Władysław Sikorski.¹⁵ Father Zapała, an army chaplain, was the trusted friend and companion of Marshal Śmigły-Rydz in Romania, Hungary and on his return journey to Poland. Father Miodoński was a man closely connected with General Sikorski and the Polish army in France. Apart from his priestly duties he personally supervised and selected all those volunteering to serve in France.

France hosts the Polish Government in Exile

The agreement with the French Government, represented in Poland by the French Ambassador Léon Noël, and signed in Paris on 9 September 1939 by Ambassador Łukasiewicz and Minister Bonnet,¹⁶ was of great significance. It enabled the legal Polish Government in France to function, to act internationally on behalf of occupied Poland and above all to form a Polish army which was highly motivated and ready to fight the German forces wherever this was possible. The September agreement, however, was

¹² Bazyli Rogowski, *Wspomnienia o Marszałku Śmigłym*, Zeszyty Historyczne, Paris, 1962, p. 76.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 51, 104.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 18, 22, 70, 86, 89.

¹⁶ Pobóg-Malinowski, *Najnowsza Historia Polityczna Polski*, London, 1986, t. III, pp. 55-58.

somewhat modest in its military effect. It limited the Polish army to one division of infantry formed from Poles living in France and volunteers from France, Belgium and Luxembourg.¹⁷ Exiles from Romania and Hungary were also accepted. The growing number of these very soon forced the Polish Government to ask the French for a new agreement and the right to increase the number of Polish soldiers.

The new document, signed on 4 January 1940 by General Sikorski and Prime Minister Daladier, transformed the army camps that had been used so far by the hitherto limited number of Poles into the official 'cradle' of the Polish army. The size and number of the units was increased. Coetquidan — the base of the Polish army of General Haller in the First World War, continued now to serve the Poles in the Second World War. In February 1940 the Polish Podhale Brigade was re-formed and began its new existence there.¹⁸

The extraordinary plan of forming a Polish army abroad was implemented by General Sikorski and his government by all possible means. The Polish *émigrés*, some born in France and speaking no Polish, were called upon to serve the country of origin of their parents. Poles employed in different professions and working in France, including members of diplomatic missions, joined them later. Polish volunteers from Belgium and Luxembourg flocked to the units, as did refugees from Romania, Hungary, Lithuania and Latvia.¹⁹ The 'red' Polish volunteers from the Spanish War, who escaped to France after their defeat, were also admitted after initial doubts and suspicions had been overcome.²⁰ This mixture of new recruits was put into the hands of professional Polish officers and soldiers of the former Polish army who had crossed to Romania and Hungary and from there, often by unusual means, had come to France. The varied social and cultural backgrounds together with language problems gave ample reasons for conflict.

The Poles born in France questioned the professional soldiers and officers — whose charges they were — as to why they had lost the war in Poland. *Émigrés* without knowledge of the Polish language were confused and unable to understand the simplest commands of their officers. Polish army drill and discipline differed from the rather liberal attitudes of French units.²¹ Former Polish members of the Foreign Legion caused serious problems for everybody due to their undisciplined, rowdy behaviour. The delivery of army uniforms,

17 Praca Zbiorowa — *Walki Pierwszej Dywizji Grenadierów we Francji w 1940 roku*, London, 1960 (hereafter *Walki Pierwszej Dywizji*), pp. 15, 16, gives the text of the Polish-French agreement concerning the formation of the Polish division.

18 Dec, *Narwik i Falaise*, p. 27; *Walki Pierwszej Dywizji*, pp. 2, 3.

19 Józef Garliński, *Poland in the Second World War*, London, 1985 (hereafter *Poland in WW2*), p. 55. Around 40,000 were in Hungary, amongst them 5,500 officers and 900 air force personnel. In Romania there were around 30,000 and almost one third of them were air force personnel comprising 9,276 men of whom 1,491 were officers. There were a further 20,000 civilians. In Lithuania there were 13,800 Polish soldiers and 1,315 in Latvia. Altogether this amounted to around 85,000 men.

20 Tadeusz Rawski, Zdzisław Stopor, Jan Zamojski, *Wojna wyzwolenicza Narodu Polskiego*, Warsaw, 1963, p. 176.

21 *Pamiętniki Emigrantów*, p. 56.

weapons and food was often erratic and, moreover, living conditions in army barracks were not only simple but primitive and almost unbearable during the winter months.

The Polish army abroad, from the very beginning, was in a state of crisis and the low morale of the soldiers was clearly visible. Undoubtedly the demoralized French army and the negative attitude of civilian Frenchmen loudly proclaiming their refusal to fight 'for Gdansk' were additional factors. In such circumstances the Polish Government and General Sikorski, with the army officers, did their utmost to change the unruly mob into a disciplined, fighting force. The general political situation, the Soviet invasion of Finland and later the German invasion of Norway, generated and enhanced motivation which helped in the formation of the Podhale Brigade which was to engage in battle with the Germans in Norway, and also raised the morale of the army. In addition, intensive war exercises, the supply of uniforms and improved skill in the Polish language amongst the *émigré* recruits transformed and unified the units in the Polish camps. In the space of a few months the Polish army abroad was ready for action.

September 1939 and the following months were a time of disintegration of all that bore the name of Poland. The state ceased to exist, the army was defeated or transferred abroad, schools and universities were closed, personal and family safety did not exist and the future was grim and uncertain. The same fate was shared by those who crossed the borders of Poland to fight for their country abroad.²² There were many differences and deficiencies dividing

22 Tormented by unknown dangers to the loved ones they had left behind, they saw no end to their own drama. What remained with them were memories of the past and old, well-known prayers — their religion.

The leaders of the powers which had destroyed their lives — Hitler and Stalin — despised religion. For Hitler Christianity was a religion fit only for slaves and was to be rooted out and destroyed (Bullock, p. 389). Stalin ridiculed the Catholic Church asking how many army divisions the Pope had in the Vatican. Following Marxist ideas he treated religion as the opium of the people, poisoning their life and insisting that it should be completely eradicated. The stand of these two Second World War leaders on the subject of religion differed from the stand of many respectable researchers in the field of the sociology of religion.

For E. Durkheim, religion: '...is not a sort of luxury which a man could get along without, but a condition of his very existence. He could not be a social being, that is to say, he could not be a man if he had not acquired it' (in R. Robertson [ed.], *Sociology of Religion*, New York, 1984, p. 53). Religious beliefs do indeed have an intellectual content, but to satisfy the human intellect is not one of the main functions of religion. The most important function of religion is to guide the human being to a better life. That is why religion is involved in all aspects of life. It does not ignore it but respects all its aspects, even the most vulgar and the most repulsive and helps man to deal with them.

Religion is an instrument for understanding all aspects of life. Participation in the cult of a group may give one feeling of joy, peace, serenity and enthusiasm — which is sufficient proof of the true value of the professed faith (see Franciszek Adamski [ed.], *Socjologia Religii*, Krakow, 1983, p. 11). 'Vital energies are over-excited, passions are more active, sensations stronger, there are even some which are produced only at this moment. A man does not recognise himself; he feels himself transformed and consequently he transforms the environment which surrounds him... A new set of

army recruits. However, with a small number of exceptions, the new army adhered to one confession, one religion. In the desperate situation of exiles, religion was a unique:

... system of ideas, beliefs and actions which helped with the problems of human life. it taught about the mystery of death and suffering and about the dark forces which endanger human life and human happiness.²³

The army bishop, Józef Gawlina, together with his Roman Catholic chaplains, was instrumental in educating and unifying the army units. The chaplains supervised and led the Christian order of the day. It started with morning roll-call at which communal prayers were said. During the week chaplains organized lectures and discussions on the principles of Christian ethics, Christian behaviour and manners. At Lent, a series of spiritual activities were organized such as retreats and confession, fundamental to the development of a Christian way of life.

Religious festivals such as Christmas and Easter had a very strong influence on the life of the soldiers. Bishop Gawlina and General Sikorski were frequently present on such occasions and always used them to talk about the celebration of the feast both in the unit and in Poland and of the urgency to be ever ready to fight for the freedom of their beleaguered country. Christmas, especially the traditional Polish Christmas Eve supper, *wigilia*, allowed them to be at one table with the soldiers like a father with his children

psychological forces is added to those which we have at our disposition for the daily tasks of existence' (Durkheim in *Sociology of Religion*, p. 52).

Religious beliefs common to a number of people also unify the group socially. The 'idea of society is the soul of religion' (*ibid.*, p. 48). The deep immersion of religion in the structure of human life, both individual and social, resulted in M. Weber's opinion that religion was given to man together with his nature—it is simply a part of human nature (*Socjologia Religii*, p. 75). J. Wach describes religion as a relationship between God and man, which indeed has always been the accepted Christian concept of religion. R. Niebuhr understands religion to be an acknowledgement of the insufficiency of the human person and an attempt to reach for help and fulfillment from a supreme power (*ibid.*, p. 78).

In the worst catastrophes, in human failure and in crime, one may find the ultimate power of God, the triumph of justice, the reward of good and punishment of evil.

Poles were mainly Roman Catholics. The Catholic Church was an institution which, though affected by war, still existed in the ruins caused by the war. Mass was celebrated as it had been in the past and bishops and priests, monks and nuns continued their usual work. Among the exiles Bishop Józef Gawlina and his army chaplains did their best to bring comfort to the needy through the perilous years of the war and helped to preserve their identity.

The extent to which this national identity was preserved shows the quality of their thinking and decision making. The most important decisions made by politicians and high-ranking soldiers were motivated not by hope of gain, but by the highest moral principles: fidelity to truth and to promises made, loyalty to their Allies and to the regimental colours and to honour. This rare and indeed unique attitude in the last war was not always appreciated or rewarded, (Teheran, Yalta and Potsdam as also the subsequent tragic history of the nation are sufficient proof of this). For many Poles religion was the only safe and firm ground in a world shaken by the cataclysm of war.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 77 (M. Yinger).

in a family home. Easter, with its message of the almighty power of God and the miracle of the Resurrection, called for faith and hope in the resurrection of their occupied country.

Certain Polish religious traditions were strange to the local population so the Poles celebrating them in local parish churches caused suspicion and even fear. In Combourg, on Good Friday afternoon 1940, a group of fully armed and helmeted soldiers entered the parish church and formed an armed guard around the sanctuary. The parishioners were shocked, anticipating robbery or, even worse, desecration of their church. The whole town was instantly in a state of alarm. It took some time for the Poles to explain to the Bretons the old Polish tradition where in the liturgy of Holy Week armed Polish knights showed in this unusual way their readiness to be with Christ and to defend Him. This tradition, they explained, was observed to that very day. The Bretons then praised the fervour of the Polish soldiers.²⁴

The departure of the Podhale Brigade to Norway was preceded by Mass celebrated by Bishop Gawlina, who blessed the men and their colours donated to the Brigade by their bishop.²⁵ In the sermon the Bishop reminded the soldiers that their struggle in Norway would be in the best Polish tradition, for the freedom of their country and that of another nation attacked by a common enemy.

The chaplains accompanied the troops in battles on land and on sea. On the occasion of the sinking of a German battleship, the chaplain reminded Polish sailors about the duty of prayer for all who die — both friends and enemies. Death brought them together to the judgement of God.²⁶ In battle, chaplains crawled between the wounded, staying with them, praying and comforting them and administering the sacraments.²⁷ After the bloody battle in Narvik, where many Poles lost their lives, the soldiers asked their commander to send a chaplain to their unit and allow him to stay with them. They needed his presence and his prayers in those dark days.²⁸

In the personnel register of the Polish Grenadier Division in France consisting of 16,000 soldiers, seven Catholic priests were registered as chaplains. There was even a Catholic priest serving temporarily with the Medical Corps, as all permanent posts for chaplains were taken.²⁹ The total number of chaplains in the 80,000-strong army, was then about thirty-five.

24 Franciszek Mientki, *Bóg i Ojczyzna*, Warsaw, 1987 (hereafter *Bóg i Ojczyzna*), p. 9.

25 Dec, *Narwik i Falaise*, p. 47.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 60.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 68.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 81.

29 Mientki, *Bóg i Ojczyzna*, p. 7.

The Norwegian Campaign (April-June 1940)

The first theatre of war common to the Allies forced them into very close co-operation on the battle front. A certain historian writes somewhat wittily about the mutual communication and the linguistic problem:

The French could not understand the British, the British could not understand either the Poles or the French, and neither French, Poles nor British could understand the Norwegians ...³⁰

When, after constant requests, an interpreter was sent to a French unit, he was fluent in Finnish but not in Norwegian. 'At Supreme Headquarters in Paris, no one appeared to know the difference ...'³¹

The Polish Podhale Brigade was not equipped to the standard of a first-class army. Artillery and anti-aircraft guns were in fact never delivered to the Brigade but such deficiencies often occurred also in the French and British armies. The imperial powers unfortunately lacked political and military leaders capable of organizing the war machine and harmonizing it with industry and transport.

On arriving in Norway it was reported that the British:

were only armed with rifles and light machine-guns ... No anti-aircraft guns, no heavy anti-tank weapons, no artillery, no vehicles ... Positioned at the end of a deep valley, waist-deep in snow, without a single map of the area, no transport, no transmitters, rudimentary training, incomplete equipment, minimal armaments and an 150-mile supply-line to Aandalsness, the men of the Sherwood Foresters and Leicester regiment awaited the enemy onslaught. ³²

.... Everything was in state of improvisation. There were no maps; we had to tear them out of geography books and send the ADC out to the Norwegian Travel Agency to buy a Baedeker.

..... During the landing, however, Lieutenant-Colonel Nicholson was to notice several fishing rods and many sporting guns ...³³

The Poles were different in some ways from the above groups by virtue of their training, discipline and excellent fighting spirit. The encounter with the Germans was not just an excursion for them, but a fight for the survival of both Norway and Poland. They were fully aware of the grim reality of the situation and ready to pay the price for this chance to fight, even if it meant sacrificing their own lives. To them war was deadly serious.

The lack of co-ordination in the Norwegian Campaign proved very costly. The personal quality of the soldiers and their readiness for sacrifice overcame many obstacles and resulted in a victory: the capture of Narvik. However, they paid for this effort with their own blood. The British lost about 2,000 soldiers and marines. The French losses were about 450 men, the Poles lost about ninety-seven men in Norway and fifty-five at sea in the submarine *Orzeł* in

³⁰ Francois Kersaudy, *Norway 1940*, London, 1990 (hereafter *Norway*), p. 202.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 116.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

Norwegian waters.³⁴ Those killed in Norway were buried in the town of Meiri, in the presence of the Norwegian community, which promised a permanent war memorial for them.³⁵ Officiating at the burial was Father Król, the Polish Chaplain, who stated that they had died for Poland. The Norwegian losses were 1,335 dead. The severity of the battles was evident in that the Germans, who were better equipped and prepared for the campaign, lost 5,296 men.³⁶

Nevertheless, soldiers of even the highest calibre could not make up for the lack of essential equipment and the maintenance of supplies, which is why the victory at Narvik was followed by a complete evacuation of Allied troops from Norway. The results of the Norwegian Campaign caused a considerable storm in Britain both in government and army circles. It brought about important changes in the government and the creation of the Ministry of Defence. France, concerned with the fast disintegration of its defences and the advance of the German army, was hardly aware of the month of intensive fighting by French units in Norway.

The Poles emerged from the Norwegian Campaign with their morale enhanced. After the humiliation of the 1939 defeat, which they felt deeply even in France, they regained their own self-respect as soldiers and also the respect of the French and British forces for their brave stand in the face of overwhelming numbers of German troops.³⁷ With the evacuation of the Allied forces, the British returned to Great Britain and the French sailed back to France. The Poles, faithful to their duties as part of the French forces, left Norway and returned to France between 3 and 8 June.

The Last Battles in France

The Podhale Brigade arrived in a France which had been changed over one month by the coming of war. The German invasion was forcing the French army to retreat. The morale of the fighting forces was low, and chaos in the army and among civilians made certain military operations simply impossible. The Polish units, deployed throughout the whole country, buoyed up by their will to fight the Germans, were less affected by the general spirit of defeatism. In some places they were the only units attempting to stop the Germans on their way to occupying the whole country. 'On 21st June there existed no

³⁴ Garliński, *Poland in WW2*, p. 81.

³⁵ Dec, *Narwik i Falaise*, p. 116.

³⁶ Kersaudy, *Norway*, p. 225.

³⁷ They proudly considered themselves the first Polish army unit abroad to have engaged in battle. Even the Germans recognized the determination and bravery of the Poles. Colonel Finne, on behalf of the Commander-in-Chief of the Norwegian army, officially praised the morale and courage of the Polish soldiers and their unique and extraordinary discipline (in *ibid.*). Similarly, the French General Bethouart personally congratulated the Polish General Bohusz and his soldiers. The sadness of losing so many friends was softened by the knowledge of a duty well fulfilled. The success of the heavy battles in Norway ended suddenly and unexpectedly.

army units fighting with the Germans apart from the Polish Grenadier Division.’³⁸

The common hardships and dangers of the front line united the soldiers by a strong bond of friendship. A former soldier who fought in France remembers two friends who volunteered to cover the slowly retreating unit using a damaged machine gun. The firing of the gun was heard for some time, but was eventually silenced. The two friends probably died in this action. One was a Polish Jew, T. Samuel, and the other, a Pole from France named Musiak, a seminarian and student of theology, preparing for the priesthood.³⁹

On 24 June the war in France ended. The Germans celebrated their victory in Paris. Shortly before the armistice the Poles decided to burn and destroy their arms and all the war equipment in their units. They planned to escape from France in small groups and by a variety of means to reach Britain to resume their seemingly impossible task — fighting for the freedom of Poland. They were evacuated from France at a difficult time and under the worst possible conditions. On 19 June 1940 General Sikorski transmitted from London over the radio the decision about the transfer of the Polish Government to London and directed the Polish forces to the south-west of France, urging them to contact British officers organizing the evacuation of the Polish army to Britain. This new order issued by General Sikorski was made known to all units within one day. Following it, though, was completely impossible. The Poles ‘were operating in isolation, belonged to different operational units and it was difficult to withdraw them during the battle, especially when the Polish soldiers wanted to fight and not run away’.⁴⁰

Units fighting on the side of the French were unable to disengage themselves in the middle of military action and try to escape. Furthermore, high-ranking French officers protested against such moves. Loyalty to fellow soldiers kept the Poles in the field up until the last possible minute. Some felt free to go after the total disintegration of the French forces and a complete loss of contact with the French units. By then, however, it was too late to make their way in large groups across a country almost totally controlled by the German army. So, having experienced a similar situation in Poland in 1939, they resorted to the tactics of dividing large units into small groups of about ten, which then had a chance of slipping out from the occupied parts of France to safer areas.

The troops located close to ports and the shore were fortunate as disengaging from the French army was much easier and contact with the British was not difficult. Evacuation then included whole units:

The evacuation of Polish troops began on 19 June from the port of La Rochelle in Western France and two days later from Bordeaux, Bayonne and St Jean de Luz.

They took off over 4,000 soldiers and 500 civilians and set sail for Great Britain.⁴¹

³⁸ Andrzej Liebich, *Na obcej ziemi*, London, 1947, p. 33.

³⁹ *Walki I Dywizji Grenadierów*, pp. 309-12.

⁴⁰ Garliński, *Poland in WW2*, p. 81.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

Up until 25 June British passenger and merchant vessels, including some small Polish vessels, carried out the emergency evacuation:

The number of rescued Polish soldiers in the first weeks after the armistice in France is not certain and varies between 16,000 and 23,000, of whom a very large number, about 5,000, were officers. The official figure released by the deputy minister of military affairs at a meeting of the National Council in London on 30 August 1940, was 19,457.

This works out at a little less than 20 per cent of the total. This was not a bad result, given the chaos of the time, the lack of transport and the dispersion of the Polish units, with the additional factor that a significant number of the men mobilized in France from the emigres living there preferred to return home.⁴²

Large groups of Polish soldiers arrived in Marseilles and Toulouse. In July, Polish was often heard on the streets of those cities and in cafés and Poles were to be seen in the 'red light' areas. A large number of them were soldiers with families in France, used to French ways and somewhat unruly and undisciplined. However, members of the former Podhale Brigade, respected for their discipline and courageous military action in Norway, helped to raise the low morale of Poles waiting for evacuation.⁴³ In the months between July 1940 and May 1941 about 2,500 Polish soldiers of different ranks were evacuated from this part of France via Spain and North Africa to Great Britain, where they joined units of the Polish army being formed there.⁴⁴

The Poles were serious about war. They had been unjustly and cruelly attacked by the Germans and were entitled and even morally obliged to defend their dignity, their families, homes and country. They did it with a great spirit of self-sacrifice. Cities in Poland were destroyed, families dispersed and separated, friends killed or imprisoned and many went abroad accepting the misery of exile to fight for the freedom of their enslaved country without knowing whether their efforts would bear fruit.

It was a great surprise to them to discover that, in France, war and suffering was of no great significance and that resistance was not seen by Frenchmen as a sensible course of action. They were far away from Poland and had no intention of fighting 'for Gdansk'.⁴⁵ What was even more surprising for Poles was that they did not fight in earnest even when they themselves were invaded by the Germans. Although the Germans advanced steadily, occupying more and more cities, Marshal Pétain forbade the French army to use arms in so called 'open cities', with 20,000 or more inhabitants, in order to save the population, the buildings and businesses from destruction.⁴⁶ Polish troops marching through the towns were warned not to shoot but to fight outside residential areas.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ M.Z. Rygor Słowikowski, *W tajnej służbie*, London, 1977 (hereafter *W tajnej służbie*), pp. 27, 29.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁴⁵ *Walki i Dywizji Grenadierów*, p.145.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

A Polish army chaplain listening on 17 May 1940 to the speech of Marshal Pétain was shocked by his defeatist tone, his plan of surrender of the country and the armistice with the Germans.⁴⁷ He found this action so unbelievable that he called the speech a lie. A French army chaplain, seeing his vehement reaction, reminded him of what had happened in the past in Calais. Surrounded by the enemy, the government of the city resigned and when a new government took over, it immediately asked for an armistice, thus surrendering the city to the enemy and hoping for certain favours. The same story was happening again. The old government had ceased to exist and a new one was asking for armistice. This is the reality in France, explained the humiliated French chaplain.⁴⁸ The reaction of Polish soldiers to this defeat was similar: pain and incredulity. A young officer threatened to shoot the Polish army chaplain for translating to the soldiers and officers the text of Marshall Pétain's broadcast, and publicly called him a liar.⁴⁹

The fall of France put an end to the ambitious attempt of the Poles to create their own army and liberate Poland. It was virtual catastrophe, yet in spite of their deep pain, the feeling of hopelessness and of having been deserted by everybody, including God Himself, the Poles observed the rules of army discipline and fought to the bitter end. After firing their last shell, a Polish artillery unit somewhat nonchalantly marched in perfect formation to a nearby town, St Die, to parade publicly for the last time in the main street surrounded by drunken French soldiers, their discarded arms and astonished women and children.⁵⁰ After the parade, deep in the forest outside the town, the commander disbanded the unit.

Demoralized to a certain extent by these events, the Poles did not abandon their dreams about the liberation of Poland. They made their way to the ports, while others, despite considerable difficulties, penetrated the south west of France.

Some of the men of the First Grenadier Division, after heavy fighting, became POWs and the rest arrived in the south of France, mainly at Marseilles. The Second Infantry Division crossed the Swiss border and was interned there by the Swiss authorities. Some soldiers, though, escaped from the camp and arrived later in Britain. The Third Infantry Division was disbanded and the soldiers arrived in Toulouse individually. The Fourth Infantry Division was partially evacuated to Britain. The soldiers of the Armoured Brigade were sent to a camp at Porte Vendre. The airmen from Lyon went to the port of Saint Jean de Luz. Part of the Podhale Brigade was evacuated to Britain and the rest went to Toulouse in the hope of being later evacuated to Great Britain.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Mientki, *Bóg i Ojczyzna*, p. 20.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁵⁰ *Walki I Dywizji Grenadierów*, p. 177.

⁵¹ Rygor Słowikowski, *W tajnej służbie*, pp. 81, 82.

CHAPTER THREE

The Polish Naval and Air Forces and the Build-Up of the Polish Army in Great Britain

In 1940 the British were a courageous and isolated nation, facing the military might of Hitler. The British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, broadcast on 14 July 1940 his unconditional resolve to fight the German aggressor on all fronts. 'We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender.'¹ These dramatic words, with their message of fearless defiance at a time when the Germans were totally victorious in Europe, doubtlessly resounded throughout a continent silenced by brute force. Yet, the continent remained silent.

On 18 June 1940 General de Gaulle broadcast to France his famous call to resistance:

Nobody knew better than he that only a tiny handful of the French were tuned in to the BBC when he called on them to resist the Nazi occupation and to have faith in his determination to redeem the nation's honour.

Nor did the French exactly flock to the colours de Gaulle raised in exile: by some accounts, only five people from the sizeable French community then in Britain were moved to volunteer their services the day after the broadcast. In his own country, already sunk in the morass of defeat that led so swiftly to collaboration, the Petain administration put in place by a damning majority of elected French parliamentarians (569 out of 666 deputies), would soon condemn him to death for high treason.²

These words, however, were well understood by all Poles in occupied Poland and abroad as it was the whole nation, not a part nor a province that was involved in the struggle. The Poles had already been resisting the Germans with the same resolve for almost a year.

¹ Józef Garliński, *Poland in the Second World War*, London, 1985 (hereafter *Poland in WW2*), p. 86.

² Philip Jacobson, 'Tributes to de Gaulle Raise Painful Questions', *The Times*, 19 June 1990, p. 9.

For this reason, Poles considered that Great Britain in 1940 was not alone. The meeting of the two premiers, Churchill and Sikorski, on 19 June expressed precisely this understanding:

Churchill's greeting made a deep impression on Sikorski. 'Tell your army that we are comrades in life and death. We shall conquer together.' The two shook hands. At a later date Sikorski confided to Ciechanowski 'that handshake meant more to me than any signed treaty of alliance or any pledged words'.³

In 1940 Great Britain and Poland were partners in a war against common enemies. One must indeed say enemies and not enemy, as quite often, for reasons best known to themselves, politicians are silent and do not address these questions clearly. In 1939 Poland had two enemies: Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union, both co-operating in the first phase of the war. Behind the victories of the Germans, who overran Poland, France and the Low Countries, bombed London and rounded up countless Jews for concentration camps, were Soviet supplies of petrol, grain and other strategic materials.⁴

On 13 July 1940 Ambassador Stafford Cripps told Stalin that:

Britain was ready to export to Russia provided her exports were not resold to Germany. Stalin contested the right of England or any other country to interfere with German-Soviet commercial relations. The Soviet Union would export to Germany part of the non-ferrous metals she bought abroad, because Germany needed those metals for the manufacture of war materials she delivered to the Soviet Union ... No country could replace Russia as a supplier of grain or petroleum, nonferrous metal, and cotton. Moreover, it was through the Soviet Union that Germany imported soya beans from Manchukuo and other essential commodities from Iran, Afghanistan, Japan and even South America.⁵

At the time of the fall of France and of the Battle of Britain, Soviet oil flowed westwards to fuel the engines of the Panzers and the Luftwaffe. German machinery and arms flowed eastwards to replenish the ailing Soviet economy. The new German cruiser, the 'Lutzow', was sold to the Soviet Navy, and renamed 'Pietrow Pawlow'. In January 1941 the USSR bought the District of Suwalki for 7,500,000 dollars in gold. The Soviet press praised the victories of the German army 'over the decadent forces of capitalism and imperialism'. Nazi propaganda praised the achievements of the great Stalin ... The NKVD and the Gestapo worked in close collaboration. German communists from Russia were handed over to the Gestapo in exchange for Russian 'émigrés' and Ukrainians from Germany. Both sides looked on Poles and Jews with undisguised contempt. The 'racial enemy' of the one was virtually indistinguishable from the 'class enemy' of the other.⁶

³ John Coutouvidis and Jamie Reynolds (eds), *Poland 1939-1947*, Leicester, 1986 (hereafter *Poland*), p. 41.

⁴ Garliński, *Poland in WW2*, pp. 37, 38.

⁵ Louis Fisher, *Russia's Road from Peace to War*, Westport, 1979 (hereafter *Russia's Road*), p. 413.

⁶ Norman Davies, *God's Playground — A History of Poland*, 2 vols, Oxford, 1981, p. 444.

Undeniably, the strong support of the Soviets was an important element in the German victory over Poland and on the western front. The Soviets invaded the eastern part of Poland on 17 September 1939, occupied it and systematically persecuted and arrested the people living there. 180,000 Polish troops in this area were interned or rather imprisoned in concentration camps. Thousands of interned officers were moved to Kozielsk, Ostaszkow, Starobielsk and Katyn' where a large number of them were executed by a single bullet in the back of the head. Hundreds of thousands of Poles — men, women and children — were deported by rail, in cattle trucks, to remote parts of the Soviet Union and condemned to hard labour, hunger and early death. The Soviets 'penetrated' Great Britain also, but by different and highly sophisticated means. The study of Communism and Communists in Great Britain presents us with people whose real loyalty was to Moscow. They were enthusiastic workers faithfully serving the Soviet Union. They infiltrated intellectual centres — universities and educational establishments — and joined the ranks of politicians, diplomats, civil servants, lawyers, trade union leaders, journalists, the army and churchmen.⁷ They were the most obedient servants of the Soviet Union.

... In Britain ... the left intelligentsia, along with its disciples and fellow-travellers in the Labour party, the unions and the media, has always had a special affection for Soviet communism. In a long line of disgrace that goes back to E. H. Carr and the Webbs, the British intellectual tradition has been dominated by supposedly intelligent people who struggled to extol whatever imagined 'good' they could find in the Soviet system.⁸

The Soviet-Nazi pact caught them with their dialectics down; they could not imagine that when the western Allies became anti-Hitler, Hitler would become pro-Soviet, and the Communists would become anti-Allies.⁹

Some could not understand the situation at the time. The Secretary-General of the British Communist Party, Harry Pollit, in his pamphlet *How to Win the War* (3 September 1939) declared that the British working class:

... will do everything it can to bring the war to a speedy conclusion, but only by the defeat and destruction of Hitler and the Nazi rule.¹⁰

In mid-September, however, instructions came from Moscow. The party leadership bowed while many members bolted. The pamphlet was withdrawn and the party succumbed not to 'revolutionary-sounding phrases' but to counter-revolutionary, pro-Nazi, pro-aggression phrases. In France and elsewhere Communists openly opposed the war effort. The United States Communist Party discontinued its boycott of German goods.¹¹

⁷ See Andrew Boyle, *The Climate of Treason*, London, 1980.

⁸ *The Sunday Times* (Editorial), 'Who's Sorry Now?', 1 September 1991, p. 25.

⁹ Fisher, *Russia's Road*, p. 407.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 408.

British Communists ... convinced themselves ... that by assisting Russia 'with all the means at their disposal and at any price' they were working for a better Britain. In the early stages of the Second World War, when Stalin was still tied to Hitler by the Nazi-Soviet Pact, this assistance consciously extended to working for Britain's defeat by the Germans, by exploiting industrial disputes and every kind of grievance and by spreading disaffection in the armed forces.¹²

The formulation of suitable definitions displaying contempt for patriotism, understood in the past as love of one's country, helped in this clandestine process to undermine morale. Bertrand Russell's definition of patriotism as 'willingness to kill or be killed for trivial reasons', and the popularization of Dr S. Johnson's 'patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel' did exactly this. Thus it became rather easy to create the 'climate of treason'¹³ in which the rejection of traditions, conventions and good manners as 'bourgeois' was even fashionable.

The Second World War is usually understood as a conflict of states or nations. This does not correspond to reality. It was a war waged by totalitarian states intent on dominating those countries opposed to them. Great Britain and Poland were then together in the firing line. In 1920 Poland successfully opposed the Soviet totalitarian state and the spread of Communism in Europe. In 1940 both Great Britain, the 'last bastion of democracy', and Poland opposed Hitler's totalitarian state.

Aliens in the New World

The Poles arrived in Britain at a very perilous time. The bravery of Polish pilots and sailors became known in Britain from the first battles with the Germans. Britain needed them and welcomed their coming.

Their duties in the armed forces, however, were only part of a soldier's life. Living in Great Britain gave them a chance to come into contact with British culture and the history of the country. Acquiring an in-depth knowledge of these subjects was impossible in a short time, but everyday experiences supplied them with many surprises. Britain was for them a country where life flowed in a different direction to that on the continent. Their first impression was that in this country nobody had yet seen an anthropological species called 'the Pole'.

Some Scotsmen were relieved to see white-skinned men, as they suspected that Poles had black or yellow skins.¹⁴ When pressed to describe geographically the place where Poles came from, the local population stated: from somewhere in Russia. A special distinction for lack of knowledge about the Poles must be reserved for Field-Marshal Montgomery, who during his

¹² Chapman Pincher, *Traitors*, London, 1987, pp. 8, 9.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

¹⁴ Felicjan Majorkiewicz, *Dane nam było przeżyć*, Warsaw, 1972, p. 149.

first visit to a Polish army camp in Scotland asked confidentially what language the Poles used in Poland: Russian or German?¹⁵

Driving on the left side of the road and many other local traditions were treated with respect but without approval or understanding. So Poles, after many years in Britain, remained aliens,¹⁶ or as the gracious wife of King George VI called them, repeating the German joke, 'General Sikorski's tourists'.¹⁷

The Polish Navy

In 1939 the Polish navy was comparatively small. The British navy had 416 warships including fifty-seven submarines. France had 223 warships including seventy-eight submarines. Poland had only nineteen fighting ships including five submarines. The Germans had 116 warships, including fifty-seven submarines, and the Italians had 274 fighting ships including 121 submarines (3).¹⁸

The small number of Polish ships was to some extent compensated for by efficient equipment, well-trained crewmen and commanding officers, and above all by courage and high morale. The British were interested in co-operating with them, as they could be very useful in naval engagements with the Germans. The proximity of Polish and German naval ports meant that the Polish navy had no chance of effectively engaging in battle with the German navy. Sailing to Great Britain and joining the British navy enabled the Poles to continue the fight in a common cause:

As early as May 1939 the appropriate agreement was made, the orders were drawn up in August on the basis of which three Polish destroyers, *Błyskawica*, *Burza* and

¹⁵ Stanisław Maczek, *Od podwody do czolga*, Edinburgh, 1961 (hereafter *Od podwody*), p. 146.

¹⁶ Georges Mikes, a Hungarian newcomer to Britain, writes in his *How To Be An Alien* (London, 1946) about other problems facing aliens in Britain as follows: 'In England everything is the other way round', then goes on to explain the truth of the words:

When people say England, they sometimes mean Great Britain, sometimes the United Kingdom, sometimes the British Isles—but never England.

When being introduced, people say 'How do you do'. An answer giving information about the general state of your health would be unforgivable. The new friend who makes this touchingly kind inquiry after your state of health does not care in the least whether you are well and kicking or dying of *delerium tremens*.

On the Continent there is one topic which should be avoided—the weather; in England, if you do not repeat the phrase 'Lovely day, isn't it?' at least two hundred times a day, you are considered a bit dull.

On the Continent people use a fork as though a fork were a shovel; in England they turn it upside down and push everything—including peas—on top of it. On a Continental bus approaching a request stop the conductor rings the bell if he wants his bus to go on without stopping; in England you ring the bell if you want the bus to stop.

People on the Continent either tell you the truth or lie; in England they hardly ever lie, but they would not dream of telling you the truth.

Many Continentals think life is a game; the English think cricket is a game.

¹⁷ Maczek, *Od podwody*, p. 133.

¹⁸ Jerzy Lipiński, *Druga Wojna Światowa na morzu*, Gdynia, 1967 (hereafter *Druga Wojna Światowa*), pp. 16-19, 29.

Grom left Gdynia on 30 August and by 1st September were in the Scottish port of Rosyth.

It was after the outbreak of hostilities, that the submarine *Wilk* joined them and a little later *Orzeł*, which had slipped out of the Estonian port of Tallin, where it had been interned, and had made a daring escape sailing without navigational instruments and eluding the Germans in pursuit. Three more submarines, *Ryś*, *Sęp* and *Żbik*, sailed for Swedish ports where they were interned. Almost the whole Polish merchant fleet of about 140,000 tons had got out of the Baltic in August.¹⁹

From the very beginning of the war there was constant naval warfare with the Germans. Up to the end of 1939 German submarines alone had sunk 114 Allied or neutral ships out of a total of 221 ships.²⁰ The German losses amounted to only nine submarines.²¹ On 18 July 1940 the personnel of the Polish navy consisted of 144 officers of various ranks and 1,397 other ranks.²² The Polish navy acted in its own units, under Polish command and subjected to Polish military regulations, though in close co-operation with the British. The years of the war gave rise to a mutual respect and friendship between both navies.

The Polish Air Force

During September 1939 over 8,000 airmen were evacuated from Poland²³ to form the Polish air force abroad. The agreement with French and British authorities, signed in Paris on 25 October 1939,²⁴ promised the support of both countries to this endeavour. At the end of January 1940, about 9,000 men, pilots and technical personnel were stationed in France. Difficulties with the French command and delays in deliveries of airplanes resulted in only 145 pilots being able to fight the Germans during the invasion of France. The fall of France left the Polish pilots with only Britain as a country ready to face the might of the Germans and in need of help. The British, very prudently, co-operated from the beginning of the war with the Polish navy which, though small, proved to be of great value.

The same approach was used with the Polish air force. As a result of this co-operation, on 8 December 1939, eighty Polish pilots of various ranks arrived in Great Britain to be trained in Eastchurch (Kent) for their future duties in the war.

British law did not permit foreign nationals to serve in the RAF unless they became members of the Volunteer Reserve. So the Poles joined the Volunteer Reserve under British Command. The number of Volunteers grew each month, so that on 4 March 1940 there were about a thousand and in May

¹⁹ Garliński, *Poland in WW2*, pp. 17, 18.

²⁰ Lipiński, *Druga Wojna Swiatowa*, pp. 58, 75.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

²² Andrzej Liebich, *Na obcej ziemi*, London, 1947, p. 45.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

²⁴ Jan Jokić, *Udział Polaków w bitwie o Anglię*, Warsaw, 1968, p. 17.

1940, there were 2,300 members of the Polish air force serving on British soil.

At the time of the fall of France 243 officers and 2,043 lower-ranking personnel were on intensive courses in Britain familiarizing themselves with British fighter planes, bombers and service on the ground.²⁵

Polish pilots evacuated from France increased the number of Volunteers to about 1,332 officers and 4,511 lower ranking-personnel so that on 18 July 1940 1,575 officers and 6,584 men of lower rank were ready and in active service in the defence of Great Britain.²⁶

The following extracts from the agreements illustrate this process.²⁷

<i>Agreement from 11 June 1940</i>	<i>Agreement from 5 August 1940</i>
The Poles will organize two bomber squadrons and a training school.	The Poles will organize four bomber squadrons, two fighter squadrons and one squadron supporting army units with full reserve of personnel — three further squadrons shall be organized as soon as possible.
The Poles shall swear allegiance twice: to Great Britain and to Poland.	The Poles shall swear allegiance to Poland only.
The Polish airmen are members of the RAFVR and will observe British law and army rules.	The Polish Air Force is part of the sovereign Polish Army. The Polish Air Force under RAF command will observe RAF rules concerning organization of units, training, discipline and war actions only.
The Polish Air Force standard may be displayed on aerodromes but below the British standard.	Aerodromes with Polish squadrons will display the Polish standard next to the British one.
Officers are admitted to the VR with the rank of Pilot Officers, the rest as privates only. They should wear standard British RAF uniforms, with the Polish Eagle on their caps and 'Poland' on the sleeve, without other insignias.	The Polish Airmen should wear the British RAF uniforms, with the Polish Eagle on their caps, Polish buttons and insignias (ranks) on the facings. They may also wear Polish Air Force badges showing their specialization.

Polish pilots and ground crew served with the British in the Royal air force, in some cases in mixed units and in others in separate Polish squadrons, but almost all entirely under British Command.

The RAF Polish Depot — 'Centrum Wyszukolenia Lotnictwa' — was in Blackpool, where newly arrived Polish pilots were registered and assigned to flying or technician's duties. On the same site there were offices with Anglo-Polish translators capable of editing and printing all necessary documents, a medical centre, the intelligence service, the police and a chaplaincy.

²⁵ Liebich, p. 37.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

²⁷ Wacław Król, *Polskie Dywizjony Lotnicze w Wielkiej Brytanii 1940-1945*, Warsaw, 1982, pp. 41-43.

On 1 October 1940 Great Britain played host to 8,154 Polish airmen²⁸ and the Polish air force fought with great valour in the defence of the British Isles during the Battle of Britain.

Polish Army Camps in Scotland

The Polish navy and air force were the élite of the Polish army. In a war where sea and air battles could decide the success of the whole campaign, they were highly sought after. The General Command of the Polish army and the Allied Forces wished the Poles to be assigned to posts for which they were best qualified, so the navy was despatched to the defence of British ports, while Polish pilots and their whereabouts were carefully monitored by the Polish and French and later British commands. In the evacuation from France to Britain such care was taken to ensure their transfer, that over 8,000 were able to fight alongside the RAF in the critical days of the Battle of Britain. They felt appreciated and valued by everybody, always involved in action or in the preparations for it, and therefore their morale was relatively good. The life of other units of the Polish army was quite different. Huge numbers of infantry or the armoured corps were difficult to transport, to accommodate and equip to the standard required.

Regular soldiers were most exposed to the bitterness of defeat, the hardships and dangers of POW camps and uncertain means of evacuation. They suffered hunger, long painful weeks or months of separation from units which perhaps no longer existed, or endless days in dug-outs and under canvas. No wonder that this sort of life was accompanied by periods of exhaustion, homesickness and depression. The soldiers evacuated from France belonged to this category. A second defeat of such magnitude — the fall of a great country in just six weeks — was almost more than they could bear.

The delayed effect of such a disaster was visible in Scottish camps, where the evacuees were located. The weather contributed to their depression. Scotland was known to have a wet climate, but to men coming from France, a country bathed in sunshine, the change was sudden and very much for the worse. The incessant rain made everything in the tents soggy and cold, the footpaths were muddy and dirty, there was mud everywhere. The question of responsibility for the defeat tormented them and was endlessly discussed, yet remained unanswered. The lack of personal contact with General Sikorski, to whom they owed allegiance as to their Commander-in-Chief, was demoralizing. They felt that he should abandon the civilians in London and come and share their lot.²⁹

The great number of evacuated officers, disproportionate to the relatively small number of men, also affected normal social relations. The officers, usually the élite of the army, now became a classless group of people, without specific assignments and without hope for a better future. The disbanding of the Podhale Brigade by General Sikorski caused bitterness and complaints

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

²⁹ Coutovidis and Reynolds (eds), *Poland*, p. 50.

from former members of the unit, proud of their victory and the high morale of the Brigade in Norway. This atmosphere completely ruined army discipline in the camp. Soldiers no longer saluted their superiors. 'The foothpath is so muddy that my only concern is avoid it, not to salute the generals' was the explanation.³⁰

It was thus quite easy to exploit the existing situation in order to undermine the spirit of unity of the army and spread gossip about 'the useless bunch of lazy and treacherous persons' in high positions in the army and in the Polish Government. The creation of special infantry units consisting solely of officers did not solve this painful problem. According to Father S. Bełch, a chaplain in one of the Scottish camps, the soldiers were visited by unknown men who incited them to distrust the Polish Government and officers and so increased their unhappiness.³¹ These visitors befriending the soldiers knew their names and addresses, which they probably passed on to others. This may explain the leaflets and magazines delivered quite regularly by post and addressed to particular individuals in the camp attacking the last stabilizing element in the life of the exiles — their religion. It is hard to imagine these occurrences as being purely accidental. Rather, they seemed to be the work of the same group which spread dissatisfaction in the British armed forces.³²

The low morale of Polish soldiers was seen in the rising criminality and lawlessness in their camps spreading even to the Scottish communities. The Poles, in some cases, instigated illegal deals in the local communities,³³ thefts, and even robberies. The poor morale of Polish soldiers was discussed in the Foreign Office:

The position of the Polish troops, inactive in a foreign country, was an unenviable one. It was felt in the Foreign Office that to give the troops something to do would prevent them quarrelling amongst themselves.

The Polish army, however, was of great value. The Foreign Office saw the existence of the Polish army as important even for maintaining morale in Poland:

If we can find some activity for the Polish troops in this country, this will help to maintain the morale of the Poles in Poland. The fact that the Poles have a Government in Claridges Hotel does not have any great psychological effect, but if we can send out news that may percolate through to Poland that the Poles still have an army which is actively engaged, this encourages the inhabitants of Poland. No mention is necessary of the fact that the Polish army only consists of 16,000 men in England and 6,000 in Egypt.³⁴

30 Wladyslaw Dec, *Narwik i Falaise*, Warsaw, 1972 (hereafter *Narwik i Falaise*), p. 144.

31 Interview with author

32 *Ibid.*

33 Dec, *Narwik i Falaise*, p. 156.

34 Coutouvidis and Reynolds (eds), *Poland*, p. 50.

From Sikorski's point of view this force was big enough to build upon. He hoped to supplement it by drawing on Polish manpower from other countries.

Armed by the British, the Poles at that time took on the duty of defending the Scottish shores against a possible invasion by the Germans. They formed the First Corps of the Polish army, which included the First and Tenth Brigade and a skeleton structure of the Sixteenth Armoured Brigade.

This straightforward account of the arrival of the Polish army in Great Britain belies the fact that the situation facing army chaplains was very complex. The life of the navy was characterized by a sudden arrival at a designated port and an equally sudden departure. So, drawing up a weekly timetable of the duties of a chaplain was almost impossible. During their stay in port, the sailors had to rest, see friends in hospital, read, meet up with others in casinos or pubs and, of course, meet the chaplain, hear Mass, listen to a sermon and receive the Sacraments. They may have needed to ask him some questions, write letters and possibly give them to the priest with the request that he mail them as soon as possible. The chaplain always had to be on call.

The Polish air force was scattered in camps throughout Great Britain. The airmen, in the line of duty, spent most of their time in their machines or on alert — in readiness to meet a possible enemy attack. The chapels at the aerodromes gave the pilots some opportunity for casual meetings between sorties. In this short time the chaplain had to minister to people whose lives were in constant danger, with the numbers changing according to losses in battle. For the same reason squadrons were frequently transferred to different aerodromes, so chaplains were obliged to follow them. The Scottish camps were more stable, but disorder, lack of discipline and low moral standards made the chaplain's duties equally difficult. The mistrust of superiors also affected the chaplain's position. He too was distrusted.

It should be borne in mind that the chaplain's duties also included pastoral care in schools and in groups attending courses where Polish pilots and technicians completed their linguistic or professional education, visiting Polish patients in hospitals and Polish inmates in prisons — all this in a foreign country using a new language. French, learnt during their stay in France, was of no use. It is small wonder that this initial phase of their new work was rather problematic. Furthermore, the priests were possibly convenient scapegoats for desperate army commanders unable to introduce discipline and order in the units.

In a letter dated 22 August 1940, Bishop Gawlina writes to Gen. Gustaw Paszkiewicz, the most trusted friend of General Sikorski:

During today's meeting with Gen. Sikorski I was informed that you have lodged a complaint against the chaplains to the effect that they do not perform their duties adequately. This is contrary to my own opinion of them and also the opinion of all army commanders, who have asked me to allow the chaplains to stay longer in their units, without any personnel changes at present. Therefore, with the permission of the Commander in Chief, I would be grateful if you would pass on to me the names

of chaplains you have reason to complain about, giving the reasons for your complaints.³⁵

The problems raised appeared to demand further discussion and clarification.

On 23 August 1940 Bishop Gawlina notified the General Command of Polish Units in Scotland, the Command of the Polish navy and Polish air force, of the meeting of all Polish chaplains, which he had arranged for 5 September in Glasgow. The Department of Propaganda and Education in the General Staff Office was also notified and invited to send its representative to the meeting. The meeting started with Mass celebrated by the Bishop in the presence of all the Polish chaplains, the church being full of parishioners and visiting Poles. The officers' choir sang during the Mass. Forty-one Polish chaplains arrived from all over the British Isles for this meeting.³⁶

In the first part of the meeting, Bishop Gawlina praised the work of the chaplains in the first year of the war and informed them of the death or imprisonment of friends. Five Polish chaplains became POWs after the battles in France: Fathers Bombas, Padacz, Madeja, Miedzinski and Pluszczyk. The chaos in administration and constant changes of personnel were due to the reorganization of the army, which would soon be completed. The chaplains would then be posted to their proper and permanent units. In a long talk to the priests, the bishop appealed to them to develop the spiritual values which were so important in the difficult and morally dangerous life in the camps. The bishop also mentioned plans for publishing a religious paper for the soldiers. He reminded the chaplains about the wearing of chaplain's insignias on their uniforms and about their behaviour when in contact with others. They should

³⁵ Bishop Gawlina's Archive, Letter, 22 August 1940.

³⁶ Those present were:

- | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Fr Karol Bik | 22. Fr Franciszek Mientki |
| 2. Fr Józef Bochenski | 23. Fr Antoni Miodoński |
| 3. Fr Leon Broel-Plater | 24. Fr Józef Narloch |
| 4. Fr Bronisław Chrostowski | 25. Fr Zsław Obertyński |
| 5. Fr Antoni Gajda | 26. Fr Ignacy Olszewski |
| 6. Fr Andrzej Głazewski | 27. Fr Konstanty Pogłodek |
| 8. Fr Aleksander Gogolinski | 28. Fr Wacław Pyszkowski |
| 9. Fr Antoni Hodys | 29. Fr Szczepan Rembowski |
| 10. Fr Wiktor Hupa | 30. Fr Tomasz Samulski |
| 11. Fr Henryk Joško | 31. Fr Mikołaj Sasinowski |
| 12. Fr Franciszek Koncki | 32. Fr Stanisław Sinkowski |
| 13. Fr Bolesław Klementowski | 33. Fr Jan Starostka |
| 14. Fr Marian Kluszczyński | 34. Fr Jan Szymala |
| 15. Fr Ludwik Kociszewski | 35. Fr Franciszek Tomczak |
| 16. Fr Antoni Kosiba | 36. Fr Franciszek Trombala |
| 17. Fr Maksymilian Kotowski | 37. Fr Antoni Warakowski |
| 18. Fr Józef Król | 38. Fr Szczepan Walkowski |
| 19. Fr Władysław Lecznar | 39. Fr Józef Zawidzki |
| 20. Fr Franciszek Lorenc | 40. Fr Andrzej Żyłka |
| 21. Fr Bronisław Michalski | 41. Fr Kazimierz Gołębiowski |

Father Walenty Nowacki (42nd on list) was absent.

always set an example of good manners. Work in any business, enterprise or in canteens was forbidden to chaplains.

During lunch Bishop Gawlina thanked Archbishop Mackintosh, who was present on this occasion, for the friendship and hospitality shown to the chaplains and the Polish army both by himself and all his diocese.

Father Michalski explained to the newcomers the problems they might encounter: for instance the law of the country concerning marriages. There had to be written authority from Bishop Gawlina for every marriage, and rules of civil law in England and Scotland had to be observed. They were instructed also about procedures in marriages of mixed religion.

The Chief of the Department of Propaganda and Education, Col. Boguslawski, who had been invited to the meeting, presented to the chaplains the benefits, conditions and possibilities of work and co-operation with the men in his department in the army. He spoke very frankly about obstacles hindering this work and elements working in their favour. He asked the chaplains for their help, which would be extremely appreciated by his officers and himself personally, and always very welcome.

After the talks and after certain important information had been passed on to the priests present, discussions concerning the following problems commenced:

- on the subject of Protestant sectarian propaganda in the camps, the leaders of the Church of Scotland agreed to cease this practice.
- education in the camps: some officers in charge were ill-mannered and produced theatrical shows of a pornographic character. The chaplains were encouraged to react negatively to this.
- concerning the Polish press in Britain, there were arguments and confusing differences.
- education in the camps was hindered by a lack of necessary books. Prayer books were needed. The printing of such books was urgent.
- British libraries and librarians were ready to co-operate with their Polish counterparts.
- education should be organized by a few officers and a chaplain acquainted with local conditions, not by orders from above.
- the newspaper *Polska Walcząca* was considered to be good but delivered with unwarranted delay.
- formal instructions should be provided for the chaplains and education officers giving each of them certain rights.
- there were complaints about the rudeness of certain officers and suggestions were made concerning instructions as to their behaviour.
- warnings were given against employing women officers in education and community centres.
- books of Polish songs were desperately needed, so printing greater numbers was a matter of urgency.
- *Dziennik Polski* was considered to be one-sided — defending only the Jews.

- the content of some radio programmes was socialist orientated. There were great reservations about this.
- the Christian-national newspaper *Jestem Polakiem* was fully supported.
- some radio programmes were inadequately prepared from the linguistic point of view.³⁷

The reorganization of the Polish army in Britain in the summer and autumn of 1940 was a difficult task not only for the Commander-in-Chief and his staff, but also for the bishop and his chaplains. The few facts cited above give us quite a clear picture of these problems. It may be useful to sum them up:

1. The chaplains worked against a background of constant personnel changes, transfers from one camp to another, an air of expectation of something new, as yet unannounced. Social contacts were casual, and there was no motivation for solid work in one place. Everything was transient.
2. Social conditions were very poor. Everyday difficulties, the humiliation of defeat, loss of social position, complaints against God and everybody around, created a very strange type of person — rough, unkind, ill-mannered, disposed to drinking alcohol and brawls. So those who worked with them adopted similar manners and attitudes.
3. The anti-Catholic propaganda in an anti-Catholic country was a new experience for the chaplains. They had to defend their flock.
4. The weakening of social structures and Polish traditions resulted in moral laxity and sexual permissiveness. This was reflected in the life of community centres and the quality of cultural and theatrical events staged there.
5. The position of the chaplain was clear — he had to protest and argue with the producers or even with the patrons of such plays. Women officers in community centres could be a serious problem. The cultural and educational officers were in possession of certain rights in their own local hall or library. The chaplain had no legal rights to interfere with them. Lack of co-operation influenced the social work, yet the chaplains, because of their education, were well prepared to enrich this field of work.
6. Permissiveness, quite often resulting in pregnancy, was one of the reasons for marriages with the local girls. Casual marriages with non-Catholic girls caused the chaplains considerable anxiety. More complicated formalities were involved and there were doubts as to the durability of such a marriage, which could be dissolved for a non-Catholic partner, yet was indissoluble for a Catholic. The law of the country setting out a pattern for marriages including religious ones had to be learned and observed.
7. Chaplains had to overcome such problems without the help of any of the usual aids. There were no books nor texts of songs and hymns, no proper chapels or organized religious groups. Polish Catholic papers were

³⁷ Bishop Gawlina's Archive, Minutes from the meeting of Polish chaplains, 5 September 1940.

virtually non-existent and delivery of other papers was severely delayed. The chaplains were also working in temporary conditions without permanent appointments or assignment of rank.

This was the reason for the Bishop's appeal to the personal holiness of the chaplains: they should be well-mannered, avoid forming the usual gulf between officers and men and create a spirit of co-operation with other officers, especially with those in charge of education, community centres and libraries. At this stage and in this situation, personal example and friendly contacts with all were the main means of furthering pastoral work.

The meeting arranged by Bishop Gawlina clarified many daunting questions and set out in practical terms the essential norms of pastoral work in these new conditions.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Formation of the Polish Army in the Soviet Union (1941-45)

In 1940, after the fall of France, almost 24,000 Polish servicemen were transferred to Great Britain, often in extremely dangerous circumstances.¹ However, with all due respect to their quality as a fighting force, a Polish army of this size was not a force capable of influencing the future of the war. The British Foreign Office saw the importance of this army in maintaining morale in Poland rather than as a practical strategic force.² The Polish command, though, had quite different plans for this army, regarding it as a nucleus which would grow and develop.

Ordinary soldiers are the backbone of an army, but in this case, they were in short supply. Continental Europe was now closed as a source of new manpower, so new recruits from there were out of the question. Great Britain was sparsely populated with Polish *émigrés* — there being no more than 2,000-3,000 people of different ages and sexes.³ So, the Polish high command was obliged to turn to countries with quite a sizeable Polish *émigré* population, which were still free and open to visitors and above all not hostile to recruitment for the Polish army.

The United States of America and Canada were thus seen as a promised land for General Sikorski and his aides.⁴ General Sikorski's visit to Canada and the United States was not easy to plan. Due to the imminent danger of a German invasion he was obliged, as the Commander-in-Chief of the Polish forces, to stay with the army. Moreover, the intense activity of the German navy and air force made his trip to America extremely risky. These considerations and the diplomatic preparations for the visit took two months. General Sikorski left Britain on 23 March 1941 on the British warship *Revenge* and arrived in Halifax (Canada) on 1 April. His diplomatic talks with

¹ Stanisław Mikołajczyk, *The Pattern of Soviet Domination*, London, 1948 (hereafter *Soviet Domination*), p. 9.

² John Coutouvidis and Jamie Reynolds (eds), *Poland 1939-1947*, Leicester, 1986 (hereafter *Poland*), p. 50.

³ Exact number is unknown.

⁴ Józef Szczypek, *Władysław Sikorski — fakty i legendy*, Rzeszów, 1984 (hereafter *Władysław Sikorski*), p. 187.

the Canadian Government were finalized by the signing of a treaty of co-operation. Talks with President Roosevelt, on the other hand, were considerably cooler. The United States as a neutral country made open recruitment to the Polish army illegal. All that was permissible was private recruitment in Polish communities, all recruits being subsequently sent off to army camps in Canada.

On 12 May 1941 General Sikorski arrived back in London. Recruitment in the United States and Canada added a mere 722 soldiers to the Polish army.⁵ The dream of 200,000 Polish volunteers from Canada and the United States of America had no chance of being realized.

However, new intelligence about concentrations of the German army and air force on the borders of the Soviet Union gave the General no time to worry about the poor results of his American visit. On 22 June 1941 the German army attacked the Soviet Union.

The German-Soviet war was welcomed by the British Government as a very positive and helpful event in the war with Germany. The vast expanse of the Soviet Union, with its large population, engaged many divisions of the attacking German army, using up huge amounts of equipment. As a result, pressure on the Western front was bound to lessen. After initial military success, the Germans encountered strong resistance from the Soviet people and the unusually severe Russian climate was also a considerable help to the Allies. There were indeed many reasons for welcoming the new war.⁶

The Poles saw the new situation in a different light. The Soviets had been aggressors just as much as the Germans.⁷ On 17 September 1939 the Soviet army had occupied Polish territory while the Polish army was defending the country against the Germans. It was like stabbing Poland in the back. The Poles, attacked from both east and west, had no chance of defending themselves. The 3,000-strong Polish army in the occupied territories was imprisoned in concentration camps. 1,500,000 Polish civilians, men, women and children were exiled from their country in sub-human conditions and were settled in penal colonies in Siberia. All these acts were considered criminal not only by the Poles but by international law also. Without any doubt the Soviets were aggressors, equal to Hitler himself.

The imminent danger to the Soviets, though, might open the door to positive changes in the future. They could be forced by these circumstances to withdraw from Poland, release the exiled civilians, men, women and children and allow the imprisoned Polish army to take part in the fight for the freedom of Poland, side by side with the Soviets. General Sikorski was a man of great political intuition. Unlike many politicians, he was anticipating the changes and was ready to react instantly to the new situation. Anthony Eden, the British Foreign Minister, was informed at once about the position of the Polish Government.

⁵ Andrzej Liebich, *Na obcej ziemi*, London, 1947, pp. 52-54.

⁶ Szczypek, *Władysław Sikorski*, p. 191.

⁷ Mikołajczyk, *Soviet Domination*, p. 11.

On 23 June 1941, just one day after the beginning of the German-Soviet conflict, General Sikorski explained the situation in a special broadcast transmitted to Poland. The Soviets reacted positively to this and on 4 July contacted the intermediary — Anthony Eden. One day later, on 5 July, the Polish-Soviet talks started. The problem of the interned army and its use in the fight against the Germans was quite easy to solve. The demands for the right of the Poles to be returned to their country was acknowledged but war conditions helped the Soviets to shelve the details of this task. The third problem was the most difficult — the Polish Government expected a return to pre-war borders with the Soviet Union. The Soviets prevaricated, opposing this categorically, whereas the Polish Government could not agree to such an injustice to its country. As a result, the talks, which lasted till 30 July, achieved nothing.

On 30 July the Polish Prime Minister General Sikorski, under pressure from Churchill and the British Government and in spite of the misgivings of President Raczkiewicz and certain Polish political parties, signed an agreement with the Soviets. The agreement set out the main points of General Sikorski's policy towards the Soviet Union:

- the Soviet-German treaty and territorial changes in Poland from 1939 were nullified.
- the resumption of diplomatic relations and an exchange of Ambassadors was announced.
- mutual help in the fight against Hitler's Germany was promised.
- Soviet agreement on the formation of a Polish army⁸ in the USSR was given.

This was the maximum that the Polish Government was able to achieve at such a decisive moment. On 12 August 1941 the Soviet Government announced an 'amnesty' for interned and expatriate Poles within its territory. Sikorski's agreement was welcomed with great joy by all Poles imprisoned in the Soviet Union.

Polish citizens were of many nationalities. Polish passports made a clear differentiation between nationality and citizenship. Jews, Ukrainians, Russians, Byelorussians, Lithuanians, Czechs etc., living in Poland were considered to be Polish citizens without having to change their nationality and had the right to be treated in the same way as ethnic Poles. Many of them also suffered and were deported to the Soviet Union together with ethnic Poles; so the word 'Poles' in the context of those exiled to Russia, includes these minorities.

Polish servicemen and civilians had heard how insecure, dangerous, hard and miserable life was in the USSR before the outbreak of war from the experience of others. However, their own experience after 17 September 1939 surpassed both the accounts of others and whatever their own imagination could have foreseen. Terror, fear, arrests, rape, robberies, beatings, torture, executions without court orders, overflowing prisons, concentration camps,

⁸ Szczypek, *Władysław Sikorski*, pp. 193, 194.

incitement to hatred among ethnic minorities, who had for centuries been living together, affected the whole population.⁹

Such violations sometimes occur in wartime when social and moral discipline disintegrates and primitive instincts take over. It was not so in this case. These actions had been meticulously planned. Lists of suspected people, professions, institutions, nationalities had been well prepared in advance. The places of imprisonment and concentration camps had been designated. Thousands of cattle-wagons and trains had been commandeered, and their journeys harmonized with normal train services.

In many ways, the work of the Soviet NKVD in eastern Poland proved far more destructive than that of the Gestapo at this stage. Having longer experience in political terror than their German counterparts, the Soviets had no need for wasteful experimentation. Their expertise had been refined, and their personnel thoroughly trained and replenished in the recent purges; and they went into action with speed. As in the German zone, the population was screened, classified and segregated. But in this case, all unfavourable elements were physically removed from the scene as soon as they were identified. An NKVD decree, issued in Wilno (Vilnius) in 1940 lists the categories of people subject to deportation:

1. Members of the Russian pre-revolutionary parties — Mensheviks, followers of Trotsky, and anarchists;
2. Members of contemporary (national) political parties, including students belonging to student organizations;
3. Members of the state Police, gendarmerie, and prison staff;
4. Officers of the former Tsarist army and of other anti-Bolshevik armies of the period 1918-1921.
5. Officers and military judges of the contemporary Polish and Lithuanian Armies.
6. Volunteers of all others armies other than the Bolsheviks;
7. Persons removed from the Communist Party.
8. Refugees, political *émigrés*, and contraband runners;
9. Citizens of foreign states, representatives of foreign firms etc.;
10. Persons who have travelled abroad. Persons who are in contact with representatives of foreign states. Persons who are esperantists or philatelists;
11. Officials of Lithuanian Ministries;
12. The staff of the Red Cross;
13. Persons active in parishes: clergymen, secretaries and active members of religious communities;
14. Aristocrats, landowners, wealthy merchants, bankers, industrialists, hotel and restaurant proprietors.¹⁰

In a very short time the Poles discovered that the whole of the USSR was equally intolerable and called it therefore the 'Inhuman Land'. These words, however, need to be qualified as they describe the conditions created by the

⁹ Julian Siedlecki, *Losy Polaków w ZSSR w latach 1939-1986*, London, 1987 (hereafter *Losy Polaków*), pp. 33-40.

¹⁰ Quoted by Norman Davies, *God's Playground — A History of Poland*, 2 vols, Oxford, 1981, pp. 447-48, after *The Dark Side of the Moon*, prefaced by T.S. Eliot, 1947.

Communists who endeavoured to corrupt everybody in the USSR. Nevertheless, some Russians and people of other nationalities, despite the horrifying conditions of terror and extreme misery, preserved their basic human and Christian values, consoling and helping the Poles.

On 26 April 1943 General Anders, in his report to General Sikorski, speaks of about 500,000 Polish soldiers imprisoned in the Soviet Union.¹¹ There were about 150 concentration camps designated for the Polish army, among those were ninety-nine built in Soviet occupied areas of Poland.¹² They housed about 100,000 officers and soldiers. Conditions were grim — no washing facilities, hunger, hard labour, no medical care and a huge mortality rate. The civilians were deported in four groups. The first deportation of men, women and children was organized on 10 February 1940, when 220,000 were transferred to the northern part of European Russia. The second deportation of about 320,000, predominantly women and children, started on 13 April 1940. These were taken to Asiatic Russia, mainly to Kazakhstan. The third was in June and July 1940 and involved mostly refugees from western and central parts of Poland. They were moved to the north of the USSR — around Archangielsk, Swierdlowsk, Nowosibirsk — and to the republic of Baszkirska, Maryjska, and to Krasnojarski Kraj. The fourth deportation was in June 1941. About 100,000 Poles, mainly from the Wilno area, were expelled from their homes and exiled by train to various parts of the USSR:¹³

They had all been processed by the NKVD and sentenced either to a lagier (concentration camp), to hard labour, or to penal exile. The vast majority were convicted for no known offence, but simply because the Polish nation was seen as the inveterate enemy of its Russian masters.

The conditions in those trains defy description. The passengers had been told to pack emergency rations for one month, but to take a minimum of personal belongings.

They were crammed in a standing position in sealed, windowless and unheated cattle-wagons, for a winter journey of three, four, five or even six thousand miles. Their only view of the outside world was through a small opening under the roof which could be used for passing out excreta and corpses.

Instances of derangement, frostbite, starvation, infanticide, even cannibalism occurred. Those who survived the trains often faced further journeys in the holds of riverboats, or on the backs of open lorries, to the furthest recesses of the Soviet wilderness.¹⁴

In the twenty months of Soviet occupation about 1,700,000 Polish citizens were deported by the NKVD to the Soviet Union. Among these were about 560,000 women, 138,000 children and 150,000 elderly persons.¹⁵ The ideas of primitive biological Darwinism, essential to Marxism, helped in furthering

¹¹ Siedlecki, *Losy Polaków*, p. 40; Praca Zbiorowa, *Napaść Sowiecka*, London, 1985, p. 101.

¹² Keith Sword, *The Soviet Takeover of the Polish Eastern Provinces, 1939-1941*, London, 1991, p. 45, Siedlecki, *Losy Polaków*, p. 40.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 40, 45, 46.

¹⁴ Norman Davies, *God's Playground*, pp. 448, 449.

¹⁵ Siedlecki, *Losy Polaków*, p. 46.

plans for the destruction of many millions of people in the Soviet Union. The same plans were put into effect when dealing with the arrest and deportation of the Poles.

They were to be destroyed physically, deprived of food and sleep, bitten by insects and crowded into cattle-wagons without any sanitary facilities. They were to be destroyed psychologically, uprooted by force from the country of their birth. They had to leave their own culture, their way of life, churches, schools and homes, friends and relatives. They were deprived of all the small yet necessary articles essential to normal everyday life, such as books, pens, soap, money, clean shirts, socks, sheets, etc. Personal possessions were limited to a pack of dry food and some clothes. Men with social positions soon became nobodies. They were stripped of everything which made them independent and self-supporting. They had to be destroyed morally. The feeling of human dignity, so important to man's well-being, had to vanish and give way to an almost animal fight for survival. The whole structure of moral life had to be ruined. Ideas about justice, charity, mercy, love, reward and punishment could no longer be valid.

The NKVD certainly knew how to deal with the 'enemies of the people':

By the time the Amnesty was granted in 1941 (for crimes that had not been committed), almost half of the one and a half million Poles deported in the previous years were already dead ... There is little doubt, if the Nazi-Soviet Pact had lasted much longer, the goal of the two participants with regard to Poland would have been achieved. By 1941, the Nazi extermination machine was moving into top gear. The Soviets needed no encouragement. Isolated from outside help, the Polish nation could not conceivably have survived in any recognizable form. Fortunately for them, the vagaries of war turned in their favour. The Poles were saved by the German attack on Russia. Although four years of horror remained, the Germans were to prove incapable of annihilating Poland single-handed. The Soviets, who for two years had acted as Hitler's chief accomplices, turned for Polish assistance. The Poles were spared total annihilation.¹⁶

The order for deportation was sudden and gave no time for preparation. The strict limits on the amount of luggage permitted and their contents could not satisfy anyone's needs for long. The Poles though, in this short time, allocated to collecting indispensable articles, apart from clothing and food, packed certain small items which they instinctively felt to be essential in preserving their identity and human dignity.

Mrs T. W. took a small cross from the wall of the school, where she was a teacher,¹⁷ to spare it from desecration by the Bolshevik soldiers, and packed it with her clothing. The cross accompanied her through all her war experiences. Other Poles took small crosses, prayer books, pictures of Our Lady Queen of Poland, the Polish coat-of-arms — all those things which reminded them of their past identity. The existing conditions created a need to own something which had for them a symbolic and sentimental value.

¹⁶ Davies, *God's Playground*, p. 453.

¹⁷ Mrs Todzia Welz: statement to the author.

Religion, in the sense of an intimate faith, was the only section of their life inaccessible to their persecutors. Religious symbols such as crosses, medals and pictures were for them a constant reminder of this freedom and a sign of hope for a better future. These symbols had the power of creating some sort of inner sanctuary mobilizing their spiritual strength. They also became intermediaries between close friends and family members and as such they were deeply respected and venerated by the deportees.

Prayer books were exceptionally important, as the main expression of religious faith of the deportees was through prayer. For many starving people the spiritual power conveyed by prayers meant more than bread.¹⁸

Prayer, linking the believer with his Creator, had a profound psychological effect. It was a way of escaping from the horrifying conditions of everyday life with its uncertainties, cruelties and corruption.¹⁹ It had the power of steering the human mind towards spiritual goodness and beauty. The habit of prayer was also a simple way of assessing a human being. A man who prays must be a good man.²⁰ The exiles needed this certainty in an inhuman land. The Polish language, traditions, songs and, furthermore, the presence in their midst of their spiritual leaders, were of great significance to the exiles.

Catholic priests, Orthodox and Protestant clergymen and Jewish rabbis were also marked out for deportation, as were the 'intelligentsia' and active professional people. However, this dark cloud had a silver lining as the presence of such people was providential for the survival of a great number of the exiles.

The sheer number of deportees gave rise to the feeling that the whole community, the whole nation was under attack, which in turn mitigated their sense of isolation. The conditions of travel or imprisonment brought together people of different levels of education and various professions. Sharing their experiences with others and discussing burning problems was a great comfort and a source of moral strength for all of them. Polish culture, with its religious and ethical background, was an equally powerful factor in their lives.

The Catholic church, deeply rooted in the history of the nation, extended its influence by the often clandestine activity of priests. When the deportations began, several priests tried to join their despairing parishioners and to go voluntarily with them into exile. The NKVD, however, removed them by force from the departing groups.²¹ Shortly afterwards they were also arrested and condemned to prison, death or exile.

Father Cieński, reflecting on these events, stated that this was a time when Polish priests created a new kind of pastoral work among the exiles, which

¹⁸ Wiesław Jan Wysocki, *Bóg na nieludzkiej ziemi*, Warsaw, 1982, p. 111.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

²¹ O.W. Cieński, 'Z dziejów polskiego duszpasterstwa wojskowego', *Duszpasterz Polski Zagranicą*, Rome, 1985 (hereafter *Duszpasterz Polski Zagranicą*), p. 295.

they subsequently practised throughout the whole of the Second World War.²² Pastoral duties were first performed unofficially and secretly in prisons and concentration camps. The imprisoned Catholics, facing the dangers of long prison sentences or even death, asked the priests to hear their confession. They in turn organized religious meditations in prison cells, religious lectures, discussions with their fellow-prisoners and guards, and they also prepared certain non-Catholics for conversion.²³ The brutality of everyday life endangered the type of Catholicism practised by many Poles in pre-war Poland.

Generally, the faith of many Poles was seen as emotional and sentimental, combined with a widespread Marian devotion. The age-old Catholic tradition often generated 'cradle' Catholics, not given to caring much about the content of their faith. Polish religious life was also, to a large extent, supported by populist elements — the customs and traditions of small towns and villages.

Yet, in the life of exiled Poles there was no place for sentimentality. The 'cradle' Catholics experienced the bitter truth that a man confessing his religious faith must be prepared for persecution and perhaps martyrdom. The villagers lost their quiet and well-regulated pattern of work and devotions, and this in turn weakened or destroyed the religious and moral life of some Poles. Some were easily subdued, frightened and perhaps even blackmailed by the Communists.

In a short time some became collaborators and even traitors used by the NKVD to spy on and control the community. They were feared and despised by everybody. Father Cieński remembers well the atmosphere of fear and distrust engendered by them in the town.²⁴ The consequences of their activity were perilous. For example, a certain priest working in secret was identified by an old friend and organist and was arrested and condemned to a concentration camp as a direct result of the 'friend's' report to the NKVD.²⁵ Such collaborators were frequently employed in this way by the Soviets throughout the enslaved communities.

However, the clash between the religious convictions of the Poles and the Communism of their persecutors did not for the most part destroy the faith of the Poles. On the contrary it seems to have given rise to considerable changes in their attitude to their religion, which grew stronger, became better motivated and ready for sacrifice without losing its Marian devotion and a fervent expression of faith rooted in a simple, yet deeply pious, folk tradition.

On 30 July 1941, in London, the Soviet Ambassador Majski and General Sikorski signed the Polish-Soviet agreement, the main subject of which was the release of Polish POWs and civilians from places of confinement and the formation of a Polish army in the Soviet Union. Two weeks later, on 14 August, Poland, represented by General Anders, signed a military agreement

²² *Ibid.*, p. 321.

²³ *Duszpasterz Polski Zagranicą*, pp. 300, 303, 306, 307, 313, 314, 316.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 1985, pp. 294, 295.

²⁵ Anatol Krakowiecki, *Książka o Kołymie*, London, 1950, pp. 78-81.

in Moscow. The formation of a 100,000-strong army apparently caused some concern to the Soviets and the number was brought down to 30,000. However, it was raised again to 40,000 men. Father Cieński, who seemed well-informed and who may well have been briefed by General Anders himself, disclosed the terms on which General Anders accepted the duties of Commander-in-Chief of the Polish army. These concerned the character of the army and the position of women's units.

The courage of the General, who had been released just ten days before from the Lubianka jail, was indeed exceptional. In a country which brutally persecuted and executed people professing their religious convictions, he demanded the right to organize a Polish army according to Polish traditions and Polish law guaranteed by the Constitution of 1921 and in accordance with the Concordat signed by the Polish Government and the Vatican in 1925, which stipulated that Polish chaplains should satisfy the religious needs of the soldiers. This was presented by General Anders to General Panfilov, who accepted General Anders's plan, which in turn was later approved by the Soviet Government. Women in the Polish army were to be organized in special support units under the command of women officers. This plan was also approved.

General Anders writes later with obvious satisfaction: 'It was a great accomplishment and a real break into the structure of Soviet life'.²⁶ He was a man with a clear vision of a Polish army which was strong militarily, but which also cared for the spiritual needs of the soldiers. In the first words he addressed to his soldiers on 22 August 1941, he expressed his belief that the Polish army could not exist without God.²⁷ Unlike the majority of Poles, General Anders was a Protestant. On 4 September 1941, authorized by the army Bishop W. Gawlina in Rome, he promoted Father Cieński to the duties of Chaplain-in-Chief of the Polish army in the Soviet Union. The Protestant, Orthodox and Jewish chaplaincies were similarly organized.²⁸ All this took place over a very short period of time.

Father Cieński had left jail on 2 September and on 4 September presented himself to General Anders, who appointed him Catholic Chaplain-in-Chief of the Polish army in the USSR. As Chaplain-in-Chief, Father Cieński celebrated the first Polish Mass in the French church in Moscow on 7 September 1941, in the presence of General Anders, the Polish Ambassador in Moscow, officers and soldiers of the new Polish army and local members of the Polish civilian population.²⁹ Thus began a period of intensive pastoral work. The chaplaincy did not have any of the essential liturgical requisites and the number of priests released from concentration camps was unknown. The headquarters of the new Polish army was in Buzuluk, in the middle Volga region. When Father

²⁶ Władysław Anders, *Bez ostatniego rodziātu*, Newtown, 1949 (hereafter *Bez ostatniego rodziātu*), p. 81.

²⁷ *Duszpasterz Polski Zagranicą*, p. 323.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 332.

²⁹ *Duszpasterz — Msza Ks. Cieńskiego w Moskwie*.

Cieński asked for information concerning the whereabouts of this place, the answer was that it was situated somewhere between the Urals and the Caspian Sea. Buzuluk, a small town in the middle of nowhere, became the 'capital' of the new Polish army.

To call Buzuluk a town may be an exaggeration, as it consisted merely of a number of wooden houses and huts prepared for summer army exercises and which in winter were uninhabitable. The deserted and ill-constructed town appeared sad and depressing for the newcomers. However, the Polish flag flying proudly over one of the buildings³⁰ lifted their spirits. The General Command of the Polish army was in evidence. For General Anders this was always a vivid memory: 'This sight impressed and moved all Poles arriving from prisons and concentration camps. It must be understood that after many years of agony, it was unbelievable to see the Polish flag flying again in Buzuluk.'³¹

The Poles, who had been dispersed throughout different parts of the Soviet Empire, and had now been released from various prisons, concentration camps and places of isolation, in a very short time filled up the huts, tents and mud huts, not only in Buzuluk, but also in neighbouring Tockoye and Tatiszczewo situated a few hundred kilometres away. For many of the travellers the roads and railway lines became places of death. Exhausted physically, starving, seriously ill, they had no chance of reaching the Buzuluk camp. Their bodies were buried by the roadside and by railway stations. The tragedy of the first deportation was repeated.³²

Those who arrived in the town were emaciated, pale, wearing old, worn-out shoes or simply barefoot and dressed in tattered rags. Father Cieński, himself released from prison, was shocked by the sight of these pathetic, tragic figures.³³ Yet, in these bodies resembling skeletons dwelt a powerful spirit. In spite of their pitiful conditions they organized a march for General Anders, who for the first time in his life took the salute from barefoot troops.³⁴ Feeding them was a problem. The supply of food to Buzuluk was so inadequate that they were given starvation rations which were even more meagre than in the concentration camps.³⁵

Up to the middle of September 1941, 25,000 Poles reported for military service in the Polish army camps. One month later over 36,000 people — 34,139 privates and 1,965 officers — were registered in the camps. According to Polish registers, many thousands of Polish officers held in prisons did not arrive in Buzuluk for reasons unknown. When General Anders made a complaint concerning this, Stalin answered: 'All have been released'.³⁶

30 *Duszpasterz Polski Zagranicą*, p. 326.

31 Anders, *Bez ostatniego rodziatu*, p. 84.

32 Siedlecki, *Losy Polaków*, p. 99.

33 *Duszpasterz Polski Zagranicą*, p. 330.

34 Anders, *Bez ostatniego rodziatu*, p. 85.

35 Siedlecki, *Losy Polaków*, p. 83.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 84.

Many of the new arrivals caused the General Command serious problems as they had no identification papers. Using their skill and imagination, officers working in the General Command had to draw up these essential documents again.

The question of identification was even more difficult for the Chaplain-in-Chief, Father Cieński. Persons introducing themselves as a Catholic priests had, in many cases, no written proof of this. Some of them were also ill, too ill to remember clearly important facts of their life. So, there was always the danger of infiltration organized by the NKVD or simply criminals trying to establish for themselves a better position in the army. Father Cieński, together with a few other priests, interviewed and tested every unknown person claiming to be a Catholic priest, asking about details of their ordination, questions of dogma and morals, liturgical problems and of course testing their knowledge of the Latin language. In this way it was possible to uncover imposters and select real priests for the duties of chaplains.³⁷

Winter was a time of hardship for the inhabitants of the dugouts, tents and mud huts. The winter season started at about the end of September, with heavy snowfalls covering everything with a thick, white carpet of snow. The wind blew the snow inside the poorly-built huts and the temperature plummeted to -50 °C. The morale of the army, however, was good. The severity of the climate and lack of food were compensated for by the ingenuity of the people, skilfully building small hearths and stoking the fires with miraculously acquired wood.

The chaplains³⁸ did their best to decorate the 'chapel' in Buzuluk, which in the past had been a hut with a large number of crude beds, later a dining room

³⁷ *Duszpasterz Polski Zagranicą*, p. 514.

³⁸ The staffing by chaplains of separate units was as follows. The General Command in Buzuluk included: Fr Włodzimierz Cieński, Chaplain-in-Chief, Fr Kazimierz Kozłowski, deputy Chaplain-in-Chief, Fr Franciszek Pluta, Fr Dr Jan Szyszko, Fr Teodor Hucal, Fr Jan Cibor, Fr Jan Kapusta, Fr S. Maciaszek.

The Fifth Division in Tatiszczew, where the Commander-in-Chief was Gen. Boruta Spiechowicz, was staffed by: Fr Teofil Wdzięczny, Parish Priest, Fr Wiktor Judycki, Fr Antoni Manturzyk, Fr Stefan Kiwiński, Fr Stefan Gąsiorek, Fr Bolesław Godlewski, Fr Tadeusz Walczak. The Fifth Division was stationed a few hundred kilometres from Buzuluk.

The Sixth Division was in Tockoye, quite close to Buzuluk, under the command of Gen. Tokarzewski, with the following priests: Fr Franciszek Tyszkowski, Parish Priest, Fr Franciszek Dubrowka, Fr Jan Chrabąszcz, Fr Marcin Wojciechowski, Fr Michał Wilniewicz, Fr Czesław Kulikowski, Fr August Huczyński.

The headquarters of the Seventh Division was stationed a short distance from Buzuluk. The Division consisted of small groups which were at that time still dispersed in various parts of the Soviet Empire. General Szyszko-Bohusz was in command of this Division. Father Stefan Zajkowski was a Parish Priest there. The other chaplains were: Fr Bronisław Siepak, Fr Józef Bednarczyk, Fr Franciszek Tomasik, Fr Bronisław Martinelis, Fr Juliusz Kaczorowski, Fr Jan Goźdz, Fr Brunon Woźniak, Fr Jan Jażdżewski, Fr Kamil Kantak, Fr Tadeusz Federowicz, Fr Antoni Hołynski, Fr Tadeusz K. Sufranowicz.

The names of the priests were given by Father W. Cieński, who as a Chaplain-in-Chief was witnessing the very beginnings of the Polish Army in the Soviet Union. The number

for the soldiers, and now a chapel and hall for meetings and possibly theatrical shows. The troops needed the chapel after long periods in isolation camps and prisons frequently subjected to atheistic brainwashing propaganda. Gen. Anders saw old soldiers weeping during Mass and loudly singing hymns imploring God to grant Poland its freedom.³⁹

Celebrating Sunday Mass was one of the main duties of the chaplains. For some unit commanders, Mass was the only duty of a priest in the army. They did not expect him to perform any other priestly function apart from the occasional funeral, wedding or possibly a baptism. They envisaged him, instead, employed in army libraries, halls, organizing educational courses, teaching the history of Poland and encouraging a spirit of patriotism in the army. General Boruta-Spiechowicz forcibly presented this view on the subject. General Tokarzewski saw the priests as 'instruments of education' of the army carrying out his direct orders.⁴⁰ The extraordinary process of forming a 'new' army tempted them to create new rules of work for the chaplains.

The conflicting opinions of the Chaplain-in-Chief, Father Cieński, were conveyed to the Commander-in-Chief, General Anders, with a request for a firm decision on the subject. General Anders's final decision was that the new Polish army and its chaplains would be subjected to the rules of Polish law, the Concordat of 1925 and the orders of the army bishop dated 20 March 1940. This had been the case in the past and would remain so in the future. The main duty of the chaplain was pastoral work. The case was closed.⁴¹

Religious talks with special emphasis on moral issues had a special significance in the anti-religious climate of Soviet society. Moral questions seemed quite convenient for some Poles. So, certain officers demanded that the talks be cancelled as they were not essential for the troops. Instead, they themselves proposed to deliver educational or patriotic talks. The tendency to manipulate and reduce the influence and work of the chaplains by some high and low ranking officers was quite apparent. Father Cieński and the other chaplains defended their rights to observe their own rules on these issues. Conflict increased. Recourse to General Anders was inevitable. On meeting the commanding officers, General Anders decreed, in no uncertain terms, that the rules given to the chaplains by their Bishop, including their right to instruct soldiers and their families on religious and moral questions, must be accepted by all without question. A vital matter had been settled for both the present and the future.⁴²

The legal position of the chaplains in the army was now clear. In their units the chaplains had the right of parish priests, together with the duties of pastoral work under the direction of the army bishop, among the soldiers and their families. The parish office and the care of books registering baptisms,

of chaplains changed and grew with the coming of new priests whose credentials it was not always possible to verify.

39 Anders, *Bez ostatniego rodziatu*, p. 85.

40 *Duszpasterz Polski Zagranicą*, p. 517.

41 *Ibid.*

42 *Ibid.*, p. 520.

weddings and burials was also entrusted to them. They observed army discipline and adhered to the orders of their commanders in everyday life.

At the beginning of October, a special delivery from London supplied the chaplains with the basic requisites which were indispensable to their work: vestments, chalices, altar wine, missals, books and portable altars. Father Cieński had to organize the baking of the altar bread in the units. The Women's Units, which included a number of nuns in their ranks, were of great help. The holy oils used in baptisms and anointing the sick were blessed, at the request of Father Cieński, by an Orthodox bishop. The existing situation and lack of a Catholic bishop in the vicinity encouraged ecumenical co-operation.

In September 1941 Bishop Józef Gawlina instructed the chaplains as to the details of their obligations. They were to conduct morning and evening prayers. The Protestant, Orthodox and Jewish soldiers had the right to pray according to their own tradition. Sunday services were celebrated in denominational groups. The Catholic Mass was most frequented because ninety per cent of the soldiers were Catholic. Saturday was the day of religious service for Jewish soldiers. Days of special significance, like the Trooping of the Colour or Independence Day, were celebrated by soldiers in their units. The Lenten period was observed in the units by two-day retreats for Catholic soldiers, confession, Communion and fasting on certain days. Jewish soldiers whose religious traditions required kosher food were given permission and money to prepare appropriate meals.

The Polish army was the army of a Christian nation. This was evident as every hall, all sleeping quarters and the refectory had a cross in a visible place on the wall. The care of the sick in the hospitals took up a lot of the chaplains' time. The number of small hospitals was growing. In October 1941 Buzuluk hospital had eighty-three patients. They needed medical care, but also the services of a priest. The priest was often the only person ready and able to help in cases of religious and material need at a time where social care was non-existent. So, the hospitals needed frequent pastoral visits.

The sad spectacle of death dampened the hope of those living in the settlements. Almost every settlement had to build a cemetery. The burials were conducted with care and every grave was blessed by a clergyman and decorated with appropriate religious symbols: a cross for Christians, the star of David for Jews. Cemeteries, often secured by a solid brick wall, very soon contained between ninety and 1,000 graves. During the formation of the Polish army in the Soviet Union about 10,000 men died in the camps, mostly of malnutrition.

With the constant influx of Poles the chaplains had to baptize children, prepare young people for marriage and officiate at wedding ceremonies. They also had to counsel those arriving on many other issues. There were documents for translation, applications and letters to the authorities in prisons and concentration camps to be written, queries about missing persons and many personal problems to be solved. Chaplains were the most suited to listen to problems and give advice. With so many time-consuming tasks, work in the

chaplain's office was almost impossible. The variety of professions among the exiles helped, in that former civil servants could be appointed to fill important posts.

The teaching of religion was an unending task. Organizing talks in the units was relatively easy. However, with families and orphaned children the situation was more difficult. Chaplains had to travel to various places to contact adults and children and instruct them in the faith. In many places they were helped by lay people and religious sisters serving in the Women's Auxiliary Corps. There were also large groups of orphans attached to the army. To feed them soldiers had to share their very modest rations, which they did without complaint.

The Soviet authorities granted the chaplains the right to work among soldiers and their families. The pastoral care of families not connected with the army was forbidden. Practically though, chaplains served all who needed help. In Soviet life, where every section of society had its spies, chaplains were exposed to severe fines or arrest and imprisonment. So they had to exercise their duties with utmost care.

The groups, dispersed in many small localities, needed bulletins and newspapers to keep them well-informed about events in their vicinity. Chaplains started to distribute very simple information printed on wrapping paper, which slowly became bulletins and, in time, even weekly papers. Again, the different professions of the exiles, including journalists and writers, were of great help in this very specialized work.

The Women's Auxiliary Corps, which in the Buzuluk region, in November 1941, included 940 women,⁴³ gave valuable support to the chaplains. They helped teach the children, visited the sick, organized choirs, took care of the chapels and vestments, and worked in the offices.

Their co-operation also resulted in the first theatrical performances. The chaplains, while defending their priestly duties as of utmost importance in their priorities of work, understood the significance of cultural life and voluntarily used their time and gifts to prepare religious and cultural events. These Polish shows, in the middle of the Soviet Union, unified the small communities and lifted the spirit of the exiles.

The religious and cultural life of the Poles in the camps attracted in many places the local Russian population. Russians, mostly of Orthodox denomination, had regular contacts with the Orthodox priests, but, knowing of the infiltration of the NKVD among the Orthodox clergy, distrusted them. At first, the Poles were also suspected of co-operation with the NKVD, but after a time of close surveillance they gained confidence and Russians were seen in Polish chapels and halls. They appreciated also the services of Polish doctors and nurses in hospitals, showing their gratitude by assistance in the work.

The lack of Communist propaganda in the life of the Polish camps was probably also attractive for Soviet and NKVD officials. This may explain the

⁴³ Maria Maćkowska, *Pomocnicza Służba Kobiet w Polskich Siłach Zbrojnych*, London, 1990 (hereafter *Pomocnicza Służba Kobiet*), p. 12.

unexpected attendance of senior Russian officers for a celebration marking Polish Independence Day on 11 November. They were present in the chapel at a solemn Mass for Poland and later at a special show commemorating the regaining of freedom in 1918. The part of the show concerning the victorious defence of Poland against the Soviet invasion in 1920, which could have offended 'eminent guests', was postponed to another day. The guests had the opportunity to discuss and exchange views with the Poles on numerous subjects, which gave them a good picture of the hopes and morale of the units they visited. Quite possibly it later influenced the decisions of Stalin concerning the future of the Polish army in the Soviet Union.

General Sikorski's dream of building up a Polish army now became a fact. After depressing, unsuccessful efforts in Canada and the United States and the rather indifferent attitude of old Polish *émigrés* to the struggles in Poland, the news from the Soviet Union was most refreshing. All Poles living there had one aim: to fight for the freedom of Poland. In the space of a few weeks over 40,000 men, from different parts of the Soviet Union, assembled around Buzuluk in a newly-formed Polish army. The difference between these two groups, *émigrés* and the Poles in the Soviet Union, was manifest. General Sikorski described it in these words: 'Outside Poland there exist two distinct groups: *émigrés* and a nation.' The nation was in the Soviet Union — the deported Poles, united as one with their suffering country and ready for great sacrifices for the liberation of Poland. General Sikorski centred his future plans on the Poles in Russia. Proof of his attitude would be his presence among them and this belief certainly boosted his project of going to the Soviet Union.

Bishop Gawlina thought about the Poles in the Soviet Union in similar terms and also planned to go there.⁴⁴ Having set in motion the required formalities with the Prime Minister, General Sikorski, and the Soviet authorities, the Bishop sent Father Król, his Vicar General, to visit the communities in the care of Polish chaplains. Father Król, overcoming various problems in communication, arrived in Buzuluk on 8 November. On Sunday 11 November he was already preaching to an unexpected crowd of Soviet officials sitting with the Poles in the chapel, and after Mass, in the company of other chaplains, he discussed with them problems of the future which preoccupied them all at that time. He announced also two other important visits: first that of the Prime Minister and later that of the army Bishop Gawlina. On 12 November, in spite of heavy snowfalls, Father Król, accompanied by Father Cieński, started visiting the Polish units.

The existence of the Polish army was founded on the Polish-Soviet agreements. Yet to the Poles the Soviets were enemies, cruel persecutors and cold-blooded killers. The long isolation in prisons and concentration camps was to some extent healed by meeting fellow countrymen in army camps. Fear of the future, however, was always present. The Soviets had been treacherous

⁴⁴ Tadeusz Wyrwa, *Biskup Gawlina, Generał Sikorski i Watykan*, *Zeszyty Historyczne*, Paris, 1989, no. 90, p. 102.

and untrustworthy friends, so a change for the worse was always a possibility. Father Król's visit and his words assuring the Poles about their unity with the Polish army in Europe, the coming visits of the Polish Prime Minister and of Bishop Gawlina, who were both concerned about them, calmed and diffused old fears and tensions. Reports about the needs of the units reached the General Command and helped to improve neglected areas, speeded up deliveries of rugs, bedding and linen and improved morale.

November was an eventful month — the arrival of the Bishop's delegate Father Król; the 11 November which was celebrated for the first time by Poles in the Soviet Union; positive changes in the units, some of which were the direct result of the Vicar-General's visit; promises of the imminent arrival of two VIPs and the arrival of a group of officers released from Kozielsk. The officers brought to Buzuluk a wooden *bas-relief* of Our Lady of Kozielsk.⁴⁵ The figure, venerated by them in the concentration camp, held a special meaning for them. It symbolized the presence of God and the protection of His Providence.

The feast of Our Lady on 21 November was marked by a solemn blessing of this icon, which was now called Our Lady of Victory. The soldiers prayed that she would guide them to triumph after so many years of sorrow and defeat.

The officers from Kozielsk were deeply sensitive to moral and religious values. After a short time, however, they discovered a secularist and atheistic undercurrent in the army, a hunger for power and influence which they decided to counteract. They proposed to set up their own organization called Marianum. This proposal was rejected by Father Cieński as a potential danger leading to division in the units and therefore harmful to the army.⁴⁶ Very soon they realized that their perception of the existing situation was correct. The official welcome of General Sikorski included a show representing historic and patriotic scenes. Shortly before its performance this show was cancelled by the officer in charge, on suspicion that it originated from and was prepared by the officers from Kozielsk. This suspicion, as was later proved, was not supported by facts. The show was the work of the whole community, of which the said officers were but a small part. Performed later, the show was warmly received and applauded by the audience.

General Sikorski's arrival on 8 December was enthusiastically welcomed. Like Moses in Egypt, he was the man who had liberated Polish prisoners condemned to death in the Soviet Union and had given them hope and the chance of a new life. Meeting him was a highly emotional experience for the soldiers. General Sikorski, in turn, was deeply impressed by the high morale of the army and their readiness to go along with him and his plans.

The visit gave the chaplains a good opportunity to exchange information and observations with the General, who was very interested in the problems of

⁴⁵ Ks. Zdzisław Peszkowski, *Wspomnienia jeńca z Kozielska*, Warszawa, 1989, p.119-122

⁴⁶ *Duszpasterz Polski Zagranicą*, p. 534.

their work. The atmosphere of the meetings was warm and the exchange of opinions with the Prime Minister was very frank. Father Cieński noted that General Sikorski was very unhappy about the apparently indifferent attitude of Pope Pius XII towards Poland which had been attacked and occupied by the Germans. His criticism concerned the whole Catholic Church. The Catholic Church, he suggested, was of no help to a nation in need. Poland might do better with the Polish national church⁴⁷ and felt that the Poles would support this national church. Father Cieński was opposed to such views, which, in his opinion, were preposterous, yet after a heated discussion General Sikorski seemed to be convinced that the majority of Poles were for a national church.⁴⁸

Father Cieński, cut off for almost two years from the mainstream of Polish politics, was intrigued by the views of General Sikorski on the role and future of the Catholic Church in Poland. He inquired everywhere looking for an explanation and uncovered a group of Polish politicians in London planning to use the Church as a tool for constructing their future dreams for a better and stronger Poland.⁴⁹ General Sikorski was probably attracted to their plans and reasoning.

This, however, did not diminish his high esteem of the Prime Minister and his important role in the Soviet Union. The main fruits of his visit in a totalitarian, Communist state were dependent on the ultimate decisions of Stalin. The results of the General's meeting with Stalin, in the presence of General Anders and Molotov, were favourable to the Poles, although Molotov bitterly criticized the General-Command and the chaplains of the Polish army. The official announcement on 4 December 1941 stated that:

- all imprisoned Poles will be released;
- the Polish army will be increased to 100,000;
- the army will be transferred to the southern part of the country;
- a few thousand Polish soldiers will be sent to Great Britain for special training.

Stalin also granted to General Sikorski a favour unique in a Communist state: permission for Bishop Gawlina to visit the Polish army. The mysterious and unsolved story of Polish prisoners from Kozielsk, Starobielsk and Ostaszków was the only distressing aspect of the General's visit.

The feeling of unity with all Poles fighting for the freedom of Poland in Europe was the main result of General Sikorski's visit to Polish army camps in the Soviet Union. After years of humiliations the Poles could be proud of

⁴⁷ The Polish National Catholic Church of America is an Old Catholic church that arose in the late 19th and early 20th centuries among Polish immigrants in the U.S. who left the Roman Catholic Church. Polish immigrants were unhappy with the Roman Catholic Church in the U.S. for several reasons, including various internal disputes and dissatisfaction with pastors, the fact that there was no bishop of Polish birth or descent in American hierarchy and the 1884 ruling that gave the bishops the title to all diocesan properties (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*).

⁴⁸ *Duszpasterz Polski Zagranicą*, p. 537.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

themselves and their nationality and could confidently tackle the tasks confronting them now. The increase in the army to 100,000 also promised an end to hunger. So far, the Soviet authorities had delivered sufficient food to the camps for only 26,000 people, although the real number of Poles in the army camps had reached 44,000. The future looked promising.

General Sikorski realized that in winter the army had no chance of performing its regular training. The heavy snowfall stopped trains and buses and made travel or marches impossible for months on end. Lack of proper drill and exercises made the units unfit for combat. The new agreement of 4 December 1941 opening new possibilities had been essential. The new headquarters of the Polish army was in Yangi-Yul, not far from Tashkent, capital city of Uzbekistan, with divisions being stationed a few hundred kilometres apart in Kirgisia, Kazakhstan and Tadzykistan. Evacuation of the army from the Buzuluk area started after Christmas. The first group left Buzuluk after 15 January 1942 with Colonel K. Rudnicki in charge.

At around the end of January Polish troops were unexpectedly visited by the NKVD dignitary, General Zhukov. The General arrived with a proposal: Polish units should be immediately sent to the front to fight the Germans in those places where they were most urgently needed. Starving and sick men, without proper preparation for military action and possessing no weapons (these, though promised, had never been delivered), were to be sent to the front, apparently to die there. The Germans would help destroy those who had survived Soviet prisons and concentrations camps, hunger and torture.⁵⁰ The sudden proposal of General Zhukov was well understood by General Anders. His answer was that the Poles would fight, but together as an army, not as separate units, and only when their health had been restored, they had been adequately nourished and had undergone a period of training for combat. The troops who had been awaiting transfer with impatience, slowly abandoned their winter camps. At the end of March, all the Polish units were in their new quarters. The placing of units over large areas⁵¹ made efficient and systematic

⁵⁰ Anders, *Bez ostatniego rodziółu*, p. 132. Władysław Pobóg-Malinowski, *Najnowsza Historia Polityczna Polski*, London, 1989 (hereafter *Najnowsza Historia ...*), pp. 225-26.

⁵¹ Polish troops were located as follows:

The Fifth Division was in Dzalalabad in Eastern Kirgisia, under the command of General Boruta-Spiechowicz. The division's chaplain was Father T. Wdzięczny. The Sixth Division was in Sachrziabs in southern Uzbekistan (near Samarkand), under the command of General M. Tokarzewski with Fr F. Tyszkowski as chaplain.

The Seventh Division was in Kermine in the middle of Uzbekistan, under the command of General Szyszko-Bohusz, with Fathers S. Zajkowski, T. Król and S. Szymankiewicz as chaplains.

The Eighth Division was stationed in Pachta and soon moved to Czok-Pak in western Kirgisia, under the command of General Rakowski. The chaplain was Father W. Judycki. A few other priests helped from time to time.

The Ninth Division was in Fergana, Tadzykistan, under the command of Colonel Bolesławowicz. The chaplain was Father J. Cibor.

The Tenth Division was in Lugow, south Kazakhstan, under the command of Colonel Schmidt. This unit was served by a number of different chaplains.

work extremely difficult for the chaplains. A considerable number of hospitals, schools and groups of civilians were added to their care, making their work even more onerous.

To understand the conditions of work it is useful to know the distances between localities. The train from Buzuluk to Yangi-Yul had to travel 3,000 kilometres. Sachriziabs was 600 kilometres from Yangi-Yul. The other divisions were about 1,000 kilometres away and between Kermine and Dzalalabad there were 2,000 kilometres.

The hardships of travel over such a wide area were balanced by mild weather. The first units left Buzuluk in freezing temperatures of -50°C. Yangi-Yul welcomed them with spring weather. The warmth of the spring sunshine welcomed the Poles to a new country, arrayed in beautiful colours. Everything seemed better: buildings, huts, trees, flowers, scenery.⁵²

At first the Poles experienced a feeling of isolation. After a few months in Buzuluk they had won over the hearts of the local population. The locals had trusted them, supported them and frequented their chapels and halls. They had been respected for their spirit and their traditions and, moreover, they had a lot in common with the local population, especially Christianity, which the locals held in great esteem.

The new camps, however, were in Muslim countries with a different and unknown culture and very few Christians. The Muslims, like the Christians, were persecuted by an atheistic state and men in uniforms. The Poles also wore a uniform, causing reserve and distrust, which was obvious to the Poles trying to deal with the local people. They simply refused to have anything to do with the newcomers, would not sell them any food or help them in any other way. In addition they kept a close eye on everything the Poles did.

After a short time they noticed that the Poles regularly prayed in their units and worshipped God.⁵³ This was a positive sign to Muslims, who also worshipped a merciful God in their prayers. The chaplains held Mass in trains, in halls, and when the weather was good, in gardens. During Lent and at Easter large congregations assembled in the gardens for retreats, confessions, Lenten devotions — Polish *Gorzkie żale*, the Way of the Cross and adoration of Christ in his tomb. All this was observed and commented on by local residents.

The General Command together with three chaplains, Fathers Cieński, Kantak and Kozłowski, organized and prepared retreats — sermons, meditations and confession — in three groups. Father Cieński took care of the women, Father Kantak preached a special sermon to the officers and Father Kozłowski to the soldiers. The number of officers and soldiers in the chapel and at confession was considerable. For some reason Father Cieński's retreat for the women appears not to have been satisfactory.

The special units in Karas (Tadzykistan), Wrewskoje (Uzbekistan) and Guzar (Uzbekistan) also had to be served by visiting chaplains.

⁵² *Duszpasterz Polski Zagranicą*, p. 537.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, Fr Cieński's testimony, pp. 734-35.

Palm Sunday was celebrated in a very special way with a procession in the garden. It was the first Polish, religious procession in a country which had destroyed all forms of religious life and was a true confession of faith. The Poles held green branches in their hands and walked proudly, singing the praises of Christ the King. In the crowd were Muslims also carrying green branches and praying. Holy Week, celebrated in a garden full of spring flowers, was for the Muslims not only a religious event, but also a spectacle. The tomb of Christ, built in the garden and decorated beautifully with flowers, at which men, some of them armed, women and children prayed, impressed them deeply.

Easter Sunday Mass, with the procession of the Blessed Sacrament, the congregation singing about the Resurrected Christ and His almighty power over evil, was memorable for everybody present. After the years of defeat and humiliation the Poles felt in their hearts a power working through history and in their lives. The Muslims took part in the procession. They sensed the spiritual involvement of the Poles, and apparently found it very touching. They noted also that among the participants were members of the General Command, General Anders, officers and soldiers from different units, women and children. Father Cieński, seeing a good number of Russian Orthodox and Muslims in the crowd, asked them after the celebrations why they had joined the Catholics. Their answer was: 'You are faithful to God and we trust you'.⁵⁴ One thing, however, they found strange and inexplicable: the Polish affection for the army. To them, the army (the Soviet army of course) was an organization which should be despised and avoided at all costs.

So after some time, a change of attitude occurred among the Muslims. The Poles noted that they were now admitted to shops and allowed to trade with the locals. Soon the Muslims confessed that for them atheists and Orthodox priests sent by Moscow were an object of mistrust and at first they had suspected that the Poles were equally in the service of Moscow. Now, they realized how mistaken they had been. The Poles were indeed different from the Soviets. The fear and reserve of the local population vanished.⁵⁵

The mirage of a better climate for ex-prisoners had been seen by General Sikorski as a way of regaining their lost health. 'They will be directed to the south of the country, where a better climate will make them feel better.'⁵⁶ The change of location and climate delighted them only for a short time before the mild and warm weather, which enhanced the Easter celebrations, very soon showed its dangerous aspects.

The south, of which the Poles had dreamed in the bitter frosts and snow of the steppes, had many surprises in store for them. In the first place, so far as physical resistance to disease was concerned, it soon became apparent that the

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 735.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, memoirs of Fr Cieński, No. 1/86, p. 126, also Bishop Gawlina's diary.

⁵⁶ Pobóg-Malinowski, *Najnowsza Historia ...*, p. 209.

cold of the far north had been less dangerous for most of the Poles in their weakened condition, than the south.⁵⁷

A bad climate had been exchanged for one even worse and poor living conditions were replaced by plain squalor. During the winter months the temperature in the mountains reached 30°C below zero, whilst strong winds constantly blew in the valleys and persistent rain transformed the ground into an impassable quagmire. In spring the area was a breeding ground for millions of malaria-carrying mosquitoes while in the summer the scorching sun burnt all the vegetation and made the rivers run dry ...⁵⁸

Initially, the Polish army was plagued by an epidemic of typhus; in May and June 1942 it was dysentery and soon afterwards malaria followed. The Poles, deprived for years of fresh fruit and vegetables, satisfied their hunger by eating inedible raw greens which resulted in acute dysentery. The district of Uzbekistan where the Poles were billeted was treeless and the soil consisted for the most part of clay. 'For several years the Soviet authorities laid a ban on the cultivation of rice there, for fear of malaria. But in 1942 the ban was lifted, and our camps were pitched along the edges of flooded rice-fields. The mosquitoes contaminated the army and the local population alike.'⁵⁹

Was it pure coincidence? Indeed no. According to Pobóg-Malinowski, the Soviet authorities had created a situation, where abhorrent conditions of life and epidemics would complete the designs of the Germans and would liquidate the Poles.⁶⁰

According to the figures printed by Ehrich, who had worked from the beginning as a Polish army doctor, when the organisation of the army was first undertaken, one man in three was affected with some form of contagious disease. At the height of the epidemic these figures had risen to one in two.⁶¹

Thousands fell ill with different complaints, but the field hospitals lacked medicines.⁶² The sad outcome was death on a vast scale. At Yangi-Yul thousands of men were dying. At Guzar people were dying like flies. Digging graves was the soldier's main evening occupation. As a result of the huge number of deaths — some days more than 120, the funerals were very simple: two or three corpses without a coffin in one grave. Many young boys escaped from a preparatory army school in Vravsk, in the neighbourhood of Guzar and the reason was that 'everyone is dying there'.⁶³

⁵⁷ Józef Czapski, *The Inhuman Land*, London, 1987 (hereafter *Inhuman Land*), pp.164-65.

⁵⁸ Józef Garliński, *Poland in the Second World War*, London, 1985 (hereafter *Poland in WW2*), p. 149.

⁵⁹ Czapski, *Inhuman Land*, p. 239.

⁶⁰ Pobóg-Malinowski, *Najnowsza Historia ...*

⁶¹ Czapski, *Inhuman Land* (English edition), p. 239.

⁶² Garliński, *Poland in WW2*, p. 149.

⁶³ Czapski, *Inhuman Land* (Polish edition), pp. 189-90.

Sickness in all its forms, and epidemics, flourished to such an extent that it seemed very doubtful whether it would ever be possible to build up a fighting force of any kind so long as we remained on Soviet territory.⁶⁴

Despite these difficulties the General Command of the Polish army did its best to:

fulfil its basic goal which consisted of gathering into the units as many ex-soldiers and volunteers as possible. This was primarily in order to form a large and powerful force and secondly to save the lives of those who came from the northern areas of Russia where they undoubtedly would have perished ... Despite the opposition of the authorities and transportation difficulties, the rush of Poles into the ranks was such that by the middle of March the Polish army had 70,000 soldiers as well as a number of families who encamped alongside the detachments. For all these people only 40,000 individual rations were provided and on 6th March, a notice was received that even this quantity would be further reduced to 26,000.⁶⁵

The fact that there were relatively small Polish groups in the countries of Western Europe, compared to the considerable part of the Polish nation exiled to the Soviet Union, was constantly in the mind of Bishop Gawlina. On 6 September he had delegated Father Król to Russia with seven crates of prayer and liturgical books, 30,000 crosses and mini field-altars, with a request to visit Polish units on his behalf. Król was also to send back first-hand information about the status of the Poles there and prepare them for his coming visit. Bishop Gawlina's mind was preoccupied in this period with possibly the most important problem of his whole life. What should be his priorities?

The shepherd's place is with his flock. This belief ultimately resulted in his decision to go to Russia for good and serve the Polish Catholics there. General Sikorski, informed by the Bishop of this plan on 19 September, assumed, jokingly, that the Bishop preferred to be in charge of 2,500,000 people instead of the small Polish group in Great Britain.⁶⁶ He did not oppose his plans, though, and promised to support his transfer to the Soviet Union. The worthy intentions of Bishop Gawlina could not, of course, be realized, bearing in mind the realities of life in the Soviet Union. A short visit, however, was possible.

On 26 October the entry visa to the USSR arrived,⁶⁷ yet, for various reasons, the required arrangements delayed the visit for six months. The Bishop used this delay to collect and dispatch several new consignments of religious books and liturgical items to Russia. On 28 April 1942 Bishop Gawlina finally arrived in Moscow. The visitor's movements in the Soviet Union were, from the beginning, carefully monitored by the Soviet authorities. Microphones installed in hotel rooms, secret agents, provocateurs

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

⁶⁵ Garliński, *Poland in WW2*, p. 150.

⁶⁶ *Wspomnienia Ks. Biskupa Józefa Gawliny*, unpublished typescript, p. 286.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 288.

watching his reactions and trying to put him in conflict with Soviet law, had been well prepared by the NKVD.

In a very short time the Bishop was able to see for himself the full truth about the life of Poles in Russia. His meeting with malnourished children in orphanages and schools that the army was caring for, resembling walking skeletons and singing 'Z trudu naszego i znoju Polska powstanie by żyć' ('from our hardships and miseries Poland will arise and live'), reduced him to tears.⁶⁸ Every day was filled with meetings with officers, soldiers, families of servicemen and children in orphanages and schools.

The meetings, starting usually with solemn Mass, a sermon and the Sacrament of Confirmation, given quite often to a few hundred children and adults, were also a time of festivity for the unit hosting the Bishop and for the local population. The latter also attended religious services and artistic events, showing respect to a 'Great Polish Mullah'. In Guzar dusty roads were sprinkled by them with water — rather a luxury in an arid country. In other places they offered local food or tasty fish, which were also a luxury in a country filled with hungry people.

The frequent illnesses, miseries of everyday life and lack of basic items such as food, soap, etc., were forgotten when the Poles welcomed their bishop. In the ruins of old Asiatic castles and monuments artistic decorations and altars appeared, new Polish poems and songs were written and boys and girls in national costumes danced Polish dances. The national costumes were often made by the ingenious organizers from paper, cardboard and the tree-bark, but nevertheless they were beautiful.⁶⁹ The Polish dances were even adopted by the locals. On 17 July Bishop Gawlina saw Uzbek children dancing a Silesian 'Trojak'.

The Bishop's diary has references to events which were of particular significance to him and which he held dear. Among others is an entry that on 24 June 1942 Colonel Klemens Rudnicki, together with his soldiers, received the Sacrament of Confirmation and that on 27 June General Władysław Anders was received into the Catholic Church. On 18 July all members of one army unit (*baon*), with the Commander Captain Kiedacz and his officers sitting in the front row, came to receive Holy Communion. General Anders had been a Protestant but now decided to become a Catholic, prompted by a wish to be of one denomination with the soldiers, as also by personal experiences in the Soviet prisons, where he had witnessed that the Catholic faith gave the Poles enormous spiritual support in desperate situations. The General's esteem for the Catholic Church had been obvious in the past from the fact that his children had received a Catholic education. Supporting the work of chaplains of all denominations, he was present at the Catholic Mass every Sunday and feast day.⁷⁰

The list of priests was growing. Concentration camps and prisons slowly released more prisoners. The visitation provided an opportunity for priests to

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 308.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 310.

be enlisted by an army bishop to the duties of chaplain. Several priests reported to the Bishop from various parts of the Soviet Union.⁷¹ The Bishop's visit also helped to enlist young, newly-ordained priests into the army. Three students of theology released from Soviet prisons were ordained by him in Yangi-Yul. They became deacons on 16 July 1942, and on 19 July, deacons Zygmunt Dzierżek, Bolesław Jakimowicz and Antoni Jankowski were ordained as Catholic priests.⁷² This unusual ceremony, was made memorable by the fact that liturgical vestments were reserved for the bishop and ordained priests only, other priests present and those assisting in the Mass had to wear civilian clothing as no other kind was available. The whole Polish army with its Generals (Anders, Szyszko-Bohusz and Szarecki) was represented on this occasion.

During his stay the Bishop had to assess complaints against certain priests. One was accused by his commanding officer of complete lack of theological knowledge and heretical sermons. The Bishop's inquiry into the case revealed that the 'priest', Wł. Gałęcki, was indeed without proper theological knowledge and was a former religious brother. The army court condemned him to three-and-a-half years in prison for false pretences.⁷³ The sentence, at the request of the bishop, was suspended, but the man had learnt his lesson. Father T. Wysoczyński was suspended by the Bishop from his duties for neglecting his duties.⁷⁴

The Bishop also felt responsible for the large civilian population enslaved in collective farms and concentration camps all over the country, not yet free, and without any support or pastoral care. The pastoral care of those not included in the army was a pressing concern for the Bishop. Seeking to solve the problem he proposed that several priests should stay with him permanently in the Soviet Union to serve the Poles unable to leave the country.

He could not offer them a salary or free maintenance, or even personal freedom. They had to be prepared to work as labourers in collective farms or even to be imprisoned in concentration camps. On 24 June 1942, all priests present at the meeting with the Bishop in Szachrziabs voted for this calling, should the Bishop request it. Initially it was decided that fifty priests, with the Bishop-in-Charge, should form a hierarchical unit serving Poles in Russia.⁷⁵ After a short time, due to difficulties with recruiting able and mature priests, the Bishop limited the number to twenty. Father Cieński, Father Chróście-

⁷¹ Fr W. Cieński, Fr K. Kozłowski, Fr K. Kucharski, Fr Walczak, Fr Król, Fr Chrostowski, Fr J. Wysoczyński, Fr Tyczkowski, Fr Rafał, Fr Dobrowolski, Fr Cziszekeutu, Fr Dziduszko, Fr B. Siepak, Fr Chmielowski, Fr S. Myszkowski, Fr P. Jagielnicki, Fr Fedorowicz, Fr J. Przybysz, Fr Grabski, Fr Łuszczka, Fr Kapusta, Fr Janocha, Fr Kołodziejczyk, Fr Lisowski, Fr Pawłodar, Fr Grzegorski, Fr Nukus, Fr Szyszka, Fr Dzizak, Fr Swot, Fr Żak, Fr Hucala, Fr Sas-Jaworski, Fr Bednarski.

⁷² *Dziennik Ks., Bp. J. Gawliny*, p. 317.

⁷³ Zbigniew S. Siemaszko, *W Sowietkim Osaczeniu*, London, 1991 (hereafter Siemaszko, *W Sowietkim Osaczeniu*).

⁷⁴ *Dziennik Ks. Bp. J. Gawliny*, p. 21.

⁷⁵ *Wspomnienia Ks. Bp. J. Gawliny*, p. 319.

chowski and all the Jesuits, a total of twenty priests, were ready to offer their services to the Bishop.⁷⁶ On 18 August the numbers shrank to fourteen. Altogether there were fifty-four Polish priests in the Soviet Union: thirty-nine in the army and fifteen visiting Polish civilian communities.⁷⁷ A further fifty priests were still in prisons.

These endeavours show the Bishop's sincerity and readiness to transfer his commitment and residence to the Soviet Union. His plan was little short of heroic, bearing in mind the circumstances. However, this well-planned venture was firmly rejected by General Zhukov. Priests performing their religious duties amongst civilians would be arrested and imprisoned. Such was the Soviet law. Thus the priests had to stay in the Polish army, only occasionally helping civilians as circumstances permitted. This was as much as they could hope to do.

Bishop Gawlina was instructed by General Sikorski to inquire into morality in the army, which was presented to the General as unsatisfactory. The Bishop listened to these reports and saw that the main reasons for complaints were sexual abuses, thefts and drunkenness in some units. There were also strong complaints about the poor moral standards in certain detachments of the Womens' Auxiliary Corps. After consultations with their Commanding Officer, Mrs Wysłouch, the problem was rectified by a decision to expel all the offenders from the Corps. All the efforts of the Bishop to assess the problem led him to the fair conclusion that despite all these lamentable cases, the general moral standard of the army was very high and the attitude to correction of shortcomings was a positive one.

Many prominent figures approached the Bishop to discuss pressing problems with him and to ask for his support. He was visited by Seidemann, Arlat, Wilk, Pruszyński, Gacki, General Wolikowski and Freid.

Meetings and exchanges of views with them apparently helped him to form and express his opinion on many subjects. In conversation with Ambassador Kot he was unambiguous about the Jewish right to their own country, which should be created somewhere in the Transjordan area and be open to Jewish *émigrés* from all over the world. The Catholic Church should be prepared to admit many Jews to the faith. They may be drawn to it by conviction or, regrettably, in the hope of doing good business. The coming years would see Polish socialists drawing closer ideologically to Christianity.

Men were lost in an arid desert dream without even a drop of water to help them survive. The Poles were lost in a spiritual desert. They had been deprived of those means which, like water, supported life, namely access to the symbols of religious values. There were no churches, no church hierarchy, no priests, no prayer books, in short, no religious symbols which would remind them of the presence of God. Bishop Gawlina and General Sikorski knew how meaningful those external symbols were for the Poles. The Bishop,

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Siemaszko, *W Sowieckim Osaczeniu*, p. 283.

who was in touch with the Poles in Great Britain, did his best to get such goods dispatched to Russia in the first days of September 1941.

The first consignment of Bibles, prayer books and other religious books, printed by Mildner in London, were sent to the Soviet Union on 9 August 1941. Crosses, field-altars, prayer books and other religious literature were dispatched with Father Król on 6 September. In the space of six months, before the Bishop left for Moscow, another consignment was sent. The Bishop received them while visiting troops in Russia. Some of the deliveries, though, were stopped by Communist censors. On 15 May, censors confiscated *Mały modlitewnik* (Little Prayer Book), printed by the Catholic Truth Society in London, and small pictures of Our Lady of Częstochowa with Russian print underneath. On 29 May eight crates of prayer books were impounded in Murmansk. A similar fate awaited a consignment of prayer books and other religious items in Kuibyshev. On 1 July 1942 a small picture of St Andrew Bobola, Patron Saint of Eastern Poland and those who had converted to the Catholic faith from the Orthodox Church, even caused a diplomatic row, stirred up by the Soviets. After that all religious items and literature arriving in the Soviet Union were confiscated.

Bishop Gawlina, while visiting army units, was on many occasions in touch with Polish or Russian Jews. Polish Jews served in the army and Russian Jews, quite often, wanted to leave the Soviet Union by joining the Poles under various pretexts. Soviet law did not qualify any of the Polish minorities, including Jews, for Polish citizenship. Admitting Jews to the Polish army was against Soviet law. Recruitment offices were closely watched or even staffed by NKVD members, who surveyed all applications, demanding rejection of Jewish ones. The Soviets later explained to these Jews that their rejection was due to Polish anti-Semitism. They were indeed masters in the spreading of hatred. The Poles were unable to change this situation. The army was infiltrated by the NKVD, the army offices had microphones installed and all activities were carefully monitored.

General Anders protested to Stalin against this law, stating that Poles and Polish authorities had no obligation to observe Russian law as the Polish Constitution held sway in the army and granted the right to Polish citizenship to all minorities.

In reality one could see that two different approaches to the problem were adopted. Wherever it was safe and possible Poles admitted Jews to the army; wherever the NKVD kept a close watch they had to reject the applications. This explains the complaints of rejection of Polish Jews by the Polish army in Russia, as also the fact of Jews serving in that same army.

Bishop Gawlina was in touch with the civilian Jews in Russia. Civilians, including rabbis, frequently visited him. With certain naiveté, he projected the image of the Catholic priest to Jewish rabbis, expecting from them a similar deep feeling of responsibility for the spiritual welfare of their community. He had encouraged priests to stay with those Poles who were unable to leave the country and carry on their work, regardless of the extreme danger to which they would be exposed as a result and he himself was ready for this sacrifice.

Rabbis, asking him for help for themselves and their families in leaving the Soviet Union, were shocked and almost scandalized by his questions about Jewish communities in Russia and the Bishop's views concerning their duties towards them. With some sadness, the Bishop concluded that he could not see rabbis as spiritual leaders of Jewish communities, but as advisers and counsellors.

Asked by Rabbis Landau and Hager for help in getting themselves and their families out of the Soviet Union, the Bishop, on 2 August 1942, personally and successfully assisted their endeavour. He was also involved in an argument with the Soviet authorities who refused children from a Jewish orphanage the right to leave Russia on 8 August 1942 as planned. As a result of his intervention these children joined children from a Polish orphanage and left Russia with them.

In August 1941 the anti-religious and highly hostile attitude of the Soviet authorities to all religious activities softened somewhat in official talks between General Panfilow and General Anders. At that time, the persecution of the Orthodox Church was being stopped and attendance at religious meetings was being encouraged for the sake of uniting a nation facing the onslaught of the Germans. This new attitude to religion was a clever manoeuvre for propaganda purposes, misleading many Western journalists and politicians. Father Kaczyński, a well-known Polish Catholic priest and politician, praised the Soviet Union for granting religious freedom to all in the country.⁷⁸

However, the desperate desire for national unity and support from the West was not so pressing after 11 June 1942, the day on which the Soviet-British treaty was signed and promises of massive Western assistance were made. The liberal trend in dealing with religious problems vanished. Repressive legislation and persecutions swiftly returned. The Polish priests were closely monitored by the NKVD in their work among civilians and some were arrested.

The Bishop's visits were under constant surveillance and there were signs of extreme regret in some references made to his presence in Russia: 'The consequences of two months of your work here, will take the next twenty years to rectify.'⁷⁹

Indeed this was no exaggeration. Bishop Gawlina devoted all his time to the Poles, whom he considered to be in his pastoral care. After four weeks in the Polish Embassy in Kujbyszew, where he organized pastoral work in the army units and in civilian communities in the Soviet Union, he left Kujbyszew to visit these places personally. Between 6 and 12 June the Bishop was in Yangi-Yul, and also visited the area around Wriewskaya. He paid visits to army units, the Polish nursery, the school, the General Staff Unit, the Womens' Auxiliary Unit, the hospital and a youth camp. Father Dzudzewicz,

⁷⁸ *Wspomnienia Ks. Bp. J. Gawliny*, p. 6.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 313.

chaplain in Wriewskaya, reported the details of his work in the army and among civilians to the Bishop.

In Yangi-Yul the Bishop organized a conference for local Polish chaplains. After the religious part of the meeting the pastoral problems of the chaplains' work were discussed at length. Those present were Fathers Cieński, Kozłowski, Dzieduszek, Sas-Jaworski, Kapusta (Eastern-Rite Priest), Czerniewski, Janocha, Myszkowski, Kołodziejczyk, Hucala, Przybysz and Lisowski.

From 13 to 18 June the Bishop was in Kermine, Kanimiech and Narpaj. Colonel Okulicki with his deputy Colonel Sulik were in charge of Polish units in these places. The Chaplain in Charge was Father Król. Apart from the army units the Bishop visited the Women's Auxiliary Unit, two hospitals, the Polish cemetery, the Polish Youth Group 'Junacy' and the Polish Cadet School. At a meeting of the clergy, local problems were debated. Participating in the discussion were the following priests: Król, Szymankiewicz, Woźniak, Gałęcki, Rogoziński, Bas, Siemaszko and Sufranowicz. Here Bishop Gawlina was pleasantly surprised: the local Russians welcomed him with flowers and a Russian army major showed great respect for him.

The Bishop reserved the days between 19 and 21 June for the Guzar area and its army units, where Colonel Leon Koc was in charge and Father Judycki served as chaplain. At a place called Karkin-Batasz, not far from Guzar, there was a large group of Polish children and young people. There, the Bishop met adolescent boys and girls in the 'Junak' units, and younger children in the orphanage and nursery. The place had a bad reputation due to a serious epidemic which had resulted in a high level of mortality amongst the victims, mostly young people and children. The following priests arrived for the meeting: Fathers Judycki, Martynelis, Wojtas, Porębski and Kapusta from Yangi-Yul. Father Wysoczyński was not invited to the conference.

From 21 to 25 June, the Bishop visited Szachriziabs. General Karaszewicz-Tokarzewski was in charge there with Colonel Klemens Rudnicki as second-in-command. Father Franciszek Tyczkowski was Chaplain-in-Charge. The army units in Szachriziabs and neighbouring Jak-Kabab were visited first, but the Bishop also went to the hospital, the sanitary unit, the local Polish cemetery, the orphanage, the old people's home and, in Kitab, a nursery and a school near the river Kaszka-Daria. On 24 June he attended a meeting of the local clergy: Fathers Tyczkowski, Wilniewicz, Turulski, Lisowski, Dubrowka, Kulikowski and Huczyński. Father Derembowicz was seriously ill and could not meet the Bishop. On the way back to Yangi-Yul, the bishop stopped for one day, 26 June, in Samarkand to see the Polish nursery and to bless the Polish hospital.

The day of 27 June was special for him. During morning Mass, General Anders made his Profession of the Faith and became a Catholic. The next day, a Sunday, the General received his First Communion. Deeply moved by the occasion, the Bishop entered the event in his diary. On 1 July the bishop worked hard to prepare a special report of his experiences for the Vatican. Between 3 and 10 July the Bishop went to Kara-Su, Dzalalabad,

Blogowieszczenska, Suzak, Kok-Janagak, Octiabrskoye. The officer in charge was General Rakowski, second-in-command was Colonel Marszałek and the Chaplain-in-Charge was Father T. Wdzięczny. The Bishop visited army units, a Soviet hospital where there were a number of Polish soldiers, a nursery for Polish children and, as was his wont, he ended his tiring trip with a conference of Polish chaplains. The conference was attended by: Fathers Wdzięczny, Mańturzyk, Gąsiorek, Godlewski, Walczak and Kiwiński. Father Zabłudowski in Kara-Su reported on conditions in the Polish nursery there, which was called 'The Bishop Gawlina Polish Nursery'.

Next, Bishop Gawlina went back to the headquarters of the Polish army at Yangi-Yul, but on 13 July he returned to Wriewskoje, and on 17 July, in the company of Colonel Mieczysław Zaleski, he visited an army unit in Wielikaja-Aleksiejewka, on the invitation of Father Siepak, the local chaplain. Medical care in the unit was in the hands of Dr Ostrowski. In charge of the unit was Lieutenant-Colonel Jan Różański. On Sunday 19 July, in Yangi-Yul, the Bishop ordained three new Catholic priests: Bronisław Jakimowicz, Zygmunt Dzierżek and Antoni Jankowski.

In the following weeks Bishop Gawlina worked diligently on organizing a permanent pastoral structure for civilians who would remain in Russia after the evacuation of the Polish army to Persia. All these plans were strongly opposed by General Zhukov who demanded that all Catholic priests should leave the Soviet Union with the army.

Bishop Gawlina was probably the first Catholic bishop working in the heart of Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kirgizja. Apart from pastoral duties he was involved in charitable activities and organizing a supply of religious books, crosses and rosaries etc., needed in the lives of Catholics. His work was indeed admirable and Soviet officials had good reason to regret his presence. Their words may be recorded as a fitting farewell and tribute to Bishop Gawlina as he was leaving the Soviet Union.

When attempting to describe Polish-Jewish contacts in the Soviet Union one must beware of generalizations. The Polish Jews in Russia were far from uniform. They differed among themselves in their opinions on many aspects of their life concerning religion, culture and politics. The problem of the survival of a nation which had for thousands of years been dispersed throughout the world, contributed to the formation of a mentality of distrust, together with a capacity for easy collaboration with those who endangered their existence in exchange for their survival. Some researchers seek to explain this fact thus:

The group marked for complete annihilation ... was caught in the strait-jacket of four-millenia-old history that 'always' reacted to force with 'alleviations and compliance' ... The reason may be that Jewish experience harbours a deep seated unwillingness, ultimately, to credit the existence of evil ...⁸⁰

All this resulted in a variety of attitudes to certain problems, as well as tension in certain areas between the other ethnic groups coming from a different background who lacked an understanding of specific Jewish

problems. With this in mind, one has to accept as inevitable the periodic rise in tension between Jews and Poles in the Soviet Union.

According to a report from Ambassador Kot,⁸¹ Poles were resentful of the way in which Jews welcomed the Soviet army of occupation in 1939 and of the insults directed at Polish soldiers imprisoned by the Soviets. They further resented their collaboration with the occupying forces, the fact that they spied on and denounced Poles to the NKVD. 'Your Poland is gone forever and will never return' — such words cannot be easily forgotten by Poles. Certain Jews in the Polish army were suspected of being in the service of the NKVD. These facts concerned mostly Jews from the eastern territories of Poland and those of low social standing. Living before the war in enclosed Jewish communities centred round the Synagogue and a Jewish school, they had little contact with the real life of the Republic of Poland. The Jewish intelligentsia, on the other hand, was usually well-integrated into Polish cultural and social life. Most of them considered themselves to be Poles and presented themselves as such throughout the years when certain countries were hostile to Poland. A small number of Jews caused problems by taking advantage of the situation and speculating on human needs and tragedies. The news about 'the amnesty' for imprisoned Poles was welcomed with joy by Jews loyal to the Polish state as a real achievement for Poland. Those who were indifferent and hostile merely saw in this an opportunity for improving their own lot.

The new Polish army was a place of refuge for a great number of Jews. Yet, even selection for army service in the tough conditions of the camps caused bitterness and complaints. Hunger and lack of necessary amenities in the army and the approaching danger of battle led to some desertions. Some volunteered for auxiliary units, rejecting front-line options. All these facts did not make Jews well-liked in the army. The idea of special Jewish units, which could have later been used for furthering the Jewish cause in Palestine, was rejected by General Anders. Nevertheless, he strongly protested against all anti-Jewish attitudes in the army. He also declared that all Jews who in the past had served in the Polish forces had the right to serve in them now. New volunteers had to be admitted according to their abilities.

The Polish Embassy employed Polish Jews. They were trusted and elected to represent the Polish Government in Exile in many offices of Polish delegations in the Soviet Union. Out of a staff of 387 people, eighty-two were Polish Jews.⁸² It seems that the tensions were based on political and moral issues rather than on religious grounds. In prison religious Jews and Poles had respected each other and mutually facilitated religious practices. In the most difficult of circumstances, the Poles evacuated from the Soviet Union about 4,000 Jews — soldiers, their families, children, orphans and a number of rabbis not included in the Polish army. In the opinion of the British authorities

⁸¹ *Polskie Sily Zbrojne*, vol. II, London, 1950, pp. 252-53.

⁸² Richard C. Lukas, *Polacy i Żydzi*, Znak Czasu, No.17, 1990, Rome, p. 246.

the Poles did their best to evacuate as many Jews as possible from the Soviet Union.⁸³

The Soviet authorities gave a long list of guarantees which were to enable the formation of a Polish army on Soviet soil. These, however, were never fulfilled, making the task utterly impossible.⁸⁴ The main problem, though, was not a military one but the basic requirement of life, namely food. Experts are well aware that maintenance of army morale often depends on a sufficient supply of high quality food. The problem for the Poles was not so much the quality of food but the absence of food.

In the middle of March 1942 the 70,000 Polish soldiers, with some of their families camping close to them, survived on 40,000 individual rations, which were further reduced to 26,000.⁸⁵ General Anders reacted swiftly to this reduction and his subsequent visit to Stalin on 18 March 1942 resulted in a decision for partial evacuation of the Polish army from Russia.

The Poles, and in particular their impatient demands for clarification concerning prisoners from Katyń, Starobielsk and Ostaszków, had become an uncomfortable problem for the Soviets. Plans to have the Polish army destroyed by the Germans by sending it inadequately prepared and not properly armed to the front, had failed. The epidemic in Turkestan had also failed to eliminate it. A renewed imprisonment of 100,000 Poles could poison the Soviets' international relations. One solution remained: get them out of the country!⁸⁶

The first evacuation to Persia started on 24 March 1942 and was completed on 3 April 1942. The evacuees consisted of 33,069 soldiers, with 10,789 civilians and 3,100 children.⁸⁷ The agreement between Britain, Poland and the Soviet Union, together with the successful Tashkent conference on 31 July 1942, opened the way to a second evacuation of Poles from Russia.

This time about 25,000 people, families of serving soldiers, left the Soviet Union. Families of Polish citizens who were not of Polish nationality could also be evacuated.

This mainly affected Jews for whom General Anders made special efforts ... Up to the last moment the greatest difficulty proved to be the question of the national minorities, as the Soviets did not want to let them go, whilst the Poles tried to make it easy for them to leave. The Soviets even began to spread rumours that, as anti-Semites, the Poles did not want to take Jews. It was necessary to correct these rumours continuously. On the whole, however, the transports left regularly and the figure of 70,000, including 4,000 Jews, was nearly reached.⁸⁸

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

⁸⁴ Garliński, *Poland in WW2*, pp. 152-53.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

⁸⁶ W. Pobóg-Malinowski, *Najnowsza Historia Polityczna Polski*, vol. III, London, 1960, p. 237.

⁸⁷ Bohdan Wroński, 'Wysięk mobilizacyjno-organizacyjny Polskich Sił Zbrojnych na Zachodzie w Drugiej Wojnie Światowej', *Rzeczpospolita Polska*, No.11 (356), 1984, London (hereafter 'Wysięk mobilizacyjno-organizacyjny Polskich Sił Zbrojnych'), p. 5.

⁸⁸ Garliński, *Poland in WW2*, p. 155.

The second evacuation started on 9 August and was completed on 1 September 1942. The evacuees were so ill and emaciated that 568 died soon after their arrival in Pahlewi.⁸⁹

The above large-scale evacuations overshadow the 'small' evacuation of Polish children from Buzuluk to India at the beginning of 1942. In January 1942 the Polish Embassy in Moscow was informed that the Indian Government would admit to India 500 Polish orphans from the Soviet Union.⁹⁰ These children, accompanied by qualified staff and a chaplain, left for Bombay at the end of the month. The first chaplain delegated to the Polish orphanage in Bombay was Father F. Pluta.⁹¹

The visit of Bishop Gawlina occurred at a crucial time for the Polish army in the Soviet Union. It was a time when a new type of soldier was being formed in war conditions and hostile territory, after a long term of demoralizing imprisonment. Bishop Gawlina, on the strength of his office and high moral authority, imposed strict rules on the work of the chaplains, investigated and corrected abuses in work and conduct and praised good work and commitment. His personality and position also influenced both officers and soldiers. He was most impressive and non-controversial both at the altar and in the pulpit. His contacts with civilians and non-Catholics were friendly and sympathetic, and his vision of the world and people was most appealing. Discussions and exchanges of view won him many supporters. Generally speaking, he was a great help to the Poles at a time of considerable crisis. He left the Soviet Union for Persia on 1 September 1942 with the last Polish evacuees.

Conclusion

The exile of hundreds of thousands of people from the eastern part of Poland, organized by the Soviets after 1939, had, in the view of Pobóg-Malinowski and others, one purpose, namely genocide.

In the spring of 1940 a large-scale scheme of deportation of millions of Polish citizens, mainly native Poles from the Eastern parts of Poland, started to function. The main idea of the plan was a destruction of 'dangerous and anti-soviet factors' in the Polish areas annexed by the Soviet Union. Proof of the planned total destruction of the deported Polish population lay in the conditions in which the deportations were conducted, in the prisons and concentration camps prepared for deportees as well as in the dispatching of hundreds of thousands of civilians to Northern Russia, Siberia and Middle Asia where the climate and living conditions were intolerable for any human being.⁹²

Documents which were secret at the time and the memoirs of surviving former deportees, which have since been collected and published, disclose the

⁸⁹ Wroński, 'Wysilek mobilizacyjno-organizacyjny Polskich Sił Zbrojnych', p. 5.

⁹⁰ Jan Kwapiński, *1935-1945 (z pamiętnika)*, London, 1947, p. 57.

⁹¹ *Duszpasterz Polski Zagranicą*, No. 3, 1985, pp. 540-41.

⁹² *Polskie Siły Zbrojne w Drugiej Wojnie Światowej*, London, 1950, t. III, p. 33.

horrifying methods and purpose of these deportations.⁹³ About half of all the exiles died within the period of about one year. Those who survived and were released from imprisonment were in many instances sick in mind and body, which resulted in difficulties and clashes in the cramped conditions of the camps.

The priests who were in the Polish army in the Soviet Union had mostly served in dioceses and monasteries in pre-war Poland. Appointed as army chaplains they had no experience in dealing with such problems in their communities and did not always solve them in the appropriate way.

The first incident which had major repercussions occurred during the first Christmas in 1941. The traditional Polish Christmas Eve celebrations — *wigilia* —, followed by midnight Mass, passed in a mood of reverence and deep feeling. Old prayers and carols aroused a deep emotional response in the congregation and led to recollections of the past and thoughts of their lost families. Alcohol helped to calm their sorrows well into the early hours of the morning. This gathering took place in a hall serving as a dining room during the day and a chapel on special occasions.

On Christmas morning, priests coming to celebrate Christmas Mass, discovered the hall, which had been decorated for Christmas, wrecked and smelling strongly of alcohol. The necessity to clean the hall on Christmas Day and the awareness of heavy drinking during the night deeply hurt the priests and scandalized the sober sections of the community. The priests reacted strongly to this almost sacrilegious, in their opinion, event, by condemning it in their sermons. The usual theme on such occasions, the mystery of the Nativity, was replaced by a severe reprimand of drunkards desecrating the holy festivities. Sermons on New Year's Day included, in no uncertain terms, the same condemnations. This caused a lot of bitterness and unhappiness in all ranks of the army.

Senior officers, discussing the situation, proposed a way of avoiding a reiteration of such rigid moral attitudes among the priests, which instead of healing wounds caused considerable harm to all. Sermons, in future, should be censored by superior officers, was the suggested solution. This, however, was rejected by General Anders.⁹⁴ Sermons would not be censored but should be prepared and preached with foresight. Father Cieński, Chaplain-in-Chief, seeing the results of well-intentioned but poorly performed duties, regretted the whole affair, promising that never again would similar sermons be preached. The moral problems of theft, drunkenness or sexual abuse would now be discussed with officers responsible for the units and the priests or Bishop Gawlina, without 'washing dirty linen in public'. In a very short time, under a year, the priests learned to adapt to their new duties and performed them well.

The role of women was defined as service in an Auxiliary Corps with the following duties: in offices, libraries, hospitals, even transport, but not on the

⁹³ Siemaszko, *W Sowieckim Osaczeniu*, pp. 10-12.

⁹⁴ *Duszpasterz Polski Zagranicą*, No. 3, 1985, p. 540.

front line or on an equal footing with the male soldiers. Father Cieński, representing Bishop Gawlina, played an important part in the making of those decisions, of which he approved.

The Polish army organized in the Soviet Union by Communists, under Berling's command, had placed on the womens' units duties equal to those of the men.⁹⁵ These included service in the front lines. This experiment, however, had not always been successful. An opinion on the subject, expressed in the history of the Emilia Plater Womens' Battalion, is significant:

In my opinion women's units should not exist in any army. The fighting army is no place for women. They may, though, serve as medics, nurses or ambulance helpers. The value of the Emilia Plater Women's Battalion was that it created a Polish community and secured the best and only way of return from exile.⁹⁶

The history of the Women's Auxiliary Corps of the Polish army in the West ends as follow:

General Anders said: 'Members of the Women's Auxiliary Corps ... never betrayed my trust. Calm and full of courage they were always ready to care for the wounded. I also have great regard for those working in canteens, driving cars and serving in communication units. The gratitude of the soldiers is the best reward for your devoted service ...'⁹⁷

Regular church services, retreats and confessions contributed to an improvement of moral standards in the units. Lectures, theatrical plays, national anniversaries, with the significant involvement of the chaplains, strengthened their sense of unity and deepened their understanding of national culture among the soldiers of the new army. The chaplain's work, embracing in addition civilians and especially orphans, was of great value. Marriages were validated, children baptized and prepared for First Communion and given religious instruction in both orphanages and schools. The spiritual care of the sick in hospitals was carried out by visiting chaplains covering long distances, mostly by train. Newsletters, printed in chaplaincies, served as the first, rather poor quality newspapers, and were precursors of the real thing which soon evolved from them.

The work of the chaplains was observed by the Soviet citizens, who were present in considerable numbers at Masses in the Polish chapels, and who also prayed fervently and asked the Catholic priests to baptize their children. The Soviet authorities could see that the Polish army had become alienated, immune to their propaganda, a community resistant to Communism. As such, it was most dangerous to their system and had to leave the country.

⁹⁵ Eleonora Syzdek, *Platerówki*, Wrocław, 1988, pp.36-38

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

⁹⁷ Maćkowska, *Pomocnicza Służba Kobiet*, p. 107.

CHAPTER FIVE

‘En Route for Poland’: the Polish Forces in the Middle East, Africa and Italy (1942-45)

Within a few months of the Polish army's formation in the USSR it became obvious that, although it was controlled by the Polish Government in Exile in London and organized according to Polish military rules, the army had little chance of participating effectively in the fight for the freedom of Poland.¹ By depriving the army of armaments, clothing, medicine and above all food, the Soviets clearly aimed to bring the organized units to a speedy dissolution. Consequently, there was only one way of salvation for the army — escape from Russia. This had to be legally acceptable to the Soviets and executed immediately. A change of mind by the Soviet authorities was always a possibility.

When it came the Poles did not miss the opportunity. In January 1942 small groups of children left Buzuluk for India and in March 1942 a large group of over 45,000 Poles left for Persia. The evacuation of a further 70,000 Poles (soldiers, civilians and children) started on 9 August and was completed on 1 September 1942. Owing to the unlimited power of the NKVD the last days in the Soviet Union, for those fortunate enough to leave, were a time of great tension. The officers of the NKVD screening those admitted to the ships departing from the Soviet Union could stop any person from embarking and refuse permission to board. The limited time in which evacuation took place made complaints to a higher authority almost impossible. One hope remained — fervent prayer.²

The starving and seriously ill Poles made amazing efforts to leave this ‘inhuman land’. Some miraculously got through the screening process only to drop lifeless on the ship's deck. This resulted in unbearable conditions on the Russian ships where there was standing room only. As a result passengers trampled the sick, the weak and the old. Lack of water worsened relations between the passengers. At one of the departure points, Krasnovodsk, water

¹ *Polskie Siły Zbrojne w Drugiej Wojnie Światowej*, vol. III, London, 1950 (hereafter *Polskie Siły Zbrojne*), p. 284.

² *Isfahan miasto Polskich dzieci*, London, 1987 (hereafter *Isfahan miasto Polskich dzieci*), p. 53.

was sold at a price equal to that of cheap wine. Some Poles, therefore, embarked carrying bottles of wine instead of water. Thirst, due to the hot weather led them to drink too much, resulting in intoxication. The crowded conditions, drunkards, crying children, the hopelessly sick and old, complete lack of water and one toilet for several hundred people sick with dysentery, made this final journey out of the Soviet Union a veritable hell.³

After two days of such conditions, every passenger dreamed only of escaping from it. Poles disembarking in Pahlevi did exactly this — they did not walk out, they ran as best they could from the ship onto firm ground and into a new country:

As the ships neared Pahlevi, a general panic erupted; everyone wanted to disembark as quickly as possible, to be out of the reach of Soviet authority. As if escaping a fire, the crowd pressed for the exit ... Upon landing, many people laughed, then cried, as if they had lost their senses for joy. But it was not madness, it was a passionate, uncontrollable burst of thanksgiving. To come suddenly upon normal human conditions of life was to be stirred profoundly ... But amid the joy, none of us could forget, that we represented only a very small percentage of all the Polish people deported to Russia between 1939 and 1941, and that after the last transport of civilians and military personnel had arrived, at least one million of our countrymen, along with their children, remained dependent upon the whims of the Soviet NKVD — among them many of our acquaintances, friends, and relatives. All of those thousands of terrified, wretched skeletons were one in that incredible bond of common suffering ...⁴

Immense human sufferings were unavoidable in a country where social, political and personal life was built on open lies. The escapees saw this clearly:

If anybody were to ask what sort of impression of this country I will carry in my memory — I will answer: unbelievable lies, perfidy in lying, which robbed the country of truth and transformed itself into a system depriving man of his dignity, denigrating him and putting him in the worst sort of filth ... With great delight we saw the vanishing shores of this deceitful country, sailing back to a free world, where our roots were ...⁵

Not all, of course, could experience such feelings as each evacuation was the last journey for those who died on the ship. Some passengers were also too weak to get up on their own and had to be helped to leave the ship slowly and subsequently died on the shores of a new country. A small number of exiles: 2,694 persons, mostly orphaned children, left the Soviet Union by train from Ashabad to Meshed in Iran.⁶

In Persia the newcomers met something they had not experienced in the two years in the Soviet Union: compassion and friendliness. The order to burn infected and dirty old linen and clothing was accepted as a symbolic farewell

³ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁴ Lucjan Krolkowski, *Stolen Childhood — A Saga of Polish War Children*, New York, 1983 (hereafter *Stolen Childhood*), pp. 68-69.

⁵ Klemens Rudnicki, *Na Polskim Szlaku*, London, 1986, p. 202.

⁶ *Isfahan miasto Polskich dzieci*, p. 59.

to their cruel and sad past in Russia. In this new country they would start a new life. For those in the first evacuation group, who arrived in time to celebrate Easter on the beaches of Pahlevi on 4 April 1942, the miracle of the Resurrection became very real:

At field altars erected along the beaches, prayers and songs of thanksgiving were heard continually, not only at services but throughout the day. Thus, conceivably, had the children of Israel thanked Almighty God for being led out of the land of bondage.⁷

The Poles felt a positive 'geographical' change. Due to the tyranny of its Communist system, the Soviet Union was a country closed to the influences of the outside world and different in its attitudes towards anything they had known in the past. Now they had come spiritually closer to Europe, to their mother country, to home. They saw this in the attitude towards religion. In Persia everybody prayed openly, as Muslims did not mind saying their daily prayers publicly. Indeed, this was a feature of everyday life. Years of suppression and persecution of religious life were over. The religious life of the Poles also blossomed. Masses were attended regularly as were May devotions, whereas the rosary was recited both privately and in Rosary circles. There were solemn processions round cemeteries with prayers offered for the dead who had been buried in the Soviet Union. The feasts of Christmas with *wigilia* and Easter with the blessing of food, were celebrated with all possible ceremony and respect for tradition. The feeling of gratitude to providence for their regained freedom encouraged them in their religious observances. The Polish priests, who arrived with the exiles as army chaplains, and the chaplains of the Carpathian Brigade were fully employed, and ministered to all groups in Persia. The Poles also faithfully followed old, pre-war patterns of national life. Special anniversaries such as Independence Day, 3 May Constitution Day, the Victory over the Soviets in August 1920 (the 'Miracle of the Vistula') were all solemnly commemorated. Traditional organizations such as Polish boy-scouts and girls-guides were revived. Singing enthusiasts organized choirs attracting even local Catholics. In one group, the local Armenian Archbishop sang in an excellent 'quartet' of Polish singers.⁸

However, there was no rejoicing in the hospital for seriously ill Polish children in Isfahan. These unfortunate souls had lost their parents in the tragic events in the Soviet Union and had been victims of starvation, beatings and violence. Their physical and psychological wounds could not be cured. The dolls and other toys usually so meaningful in a child's life, in this case, did not attract them. However, compassionate care helped to ease their pain.

The newcomers: soldiers, civilians and children, were allocated to camps and schools or hospitals in four towns. There were four camps — numbers 1, 2, 3 and 5 — in Teheran. In the same city were also: a hostel for older civilians, an orphanage, a handicraft centre and a hostel for Polish teachers.

⁷ Krolikowski, *Stolen Childhood*, p. 69.

⁸ *Isfahan miasto Polskich dzieci*, p. 326.

Achwaz had one Polish camp, as did Meszed, whereas Isfahan was called 'the city of Polish children'.⁹

The image of Poles in Persia is indeed striking. After two years of persecution, which almost completely stifled their religious and national life, they were physically weakened but spiritually very much alive. It seemed that life in the Soviet Union, where they were denied all the cultural and spiritual values which they had assimilated in Poland, threw the meaning and quality of Polish culture and religion into relief.

Of course, some did betray their religion and traditions. After two years of hunger, humiliation and misery the chance of material gain and a comfortable life were very tempting. The order to be ready for evacuation from Teheran created panic among those working in Persian houses, shops, restaurants and those teaching languages. To lure clients, Persians opened restaurants with names familiar to Poles such as *Polonia* and let the staff wear traditional Polish costumes. Work in Persia seemed secure and was well paid.

Young girls, however, were at risk. Buying a wife or slave was an accepted custom and Persians were ready to pay good money for the company of Polish girls.¹⁰ This gave rise to extreme reactions among certain Poles.

In the beginning, the Polish army became a meeting place for all the Polish prostitutes from the East. What sort of human riff-raff was being admitted to the Polish army! It seemed as if a rubbish bin had been emptied into the Caspian Sea: the old and sick, the handicapped, children and those ... women.¹¹

Out of 100,000 Poles, one could, of course, find criminals and prostitutes, but the total number of these, even in the eyes of the very critically minded person, did not exceed one hundred.¹² Indeed, the same merciless critic who judged Polish women so severely, writes, a few lines further on, about the Polish Women's Auxiliary units, who guarded their camps at night with loaded rifles.¹³

Personal freedom in Persia gave most Poles the chance to breathe deeply a cultural and religious atmosphere which helped to focus all their thoughts on Poland. A Catholic church, a chapel in a convent or camp where Mass was said, became the focus of the large community where Polish problems were brought into the open, prayed for and discussed.

On 14 February 1943, for instance, in Teheran's French church, Father Słapa, in place of a sermon, read a letter sent to General Sikorski by Polish women from Warsaw. They informed the General about everyday life in occupied Poland, mass arrests, torture, imminent death at any time of day or

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

¹⁰ B. Brzezicki, *Z Łagru Nachodka do Ziemi Świętej*, London, 1974 (hereafter *Z Łagru Nachodka*, pp. 131, 139, 141.

¹¹ Melchior Wańkowicz, *Od Stołpców po Kair*, Warsaw, 1971 (hereafter *Od Stołpców*), p. 351.

¹² W. Pobóg-Malinowski, *Najnowsza Historia Polityczna Polski*, 3 vols, London, 1986 (hereafter *Historia Polityczna Polski*), II, p. 286, n. 137.

¹³ Wańkowicz, *Od Stołpców*, p. 351.

night. They did not appeal for help. They asked for action on the battlefield, the bombing of German cities, punishment for crimes committed and the liberation of their country before Poland was totally destroyed. The congregation was shocked when informed of the horrifying realities of life in Poland.

The priest confronted the Poles in Persia, now living in relative comfort, with the plight of their brothers and sisters in occupied Poland. He called for understanding, charity, love and a spirit of co-operation, a readiness for sacrifice in the fight for the freedom of their country.¹⁴ Such matters were discussed after Mass and thus those present in church were intimately involved in the tragedies of their motherland.¹⁵ In a similar way, news about the horrors of Katyń was announced and spread.

The well-ordered life of the Poles in Persia showed signs of stability. Regularly performed duties, well-prepared meals, personal hygiene, the chance to plan their own lives, to earn some money and the freedom to spend it, put the Poles on the path to regaining the 'normality' which had been lost in Russia. Of course, the war never allowed them to settle for long. The camps, schools and facilities for adult education were temporary and were directed towards the main goal — victory over the Germans. Hence, the continual personal transfers and the movement of whole groups and organized units from place to place, from one country to another.

The creation of a strong Polish army was the most important task of the Commander-in-Chief and his officers. The loss of respect which the Polish army suffered as a result of 1939 was vindicated in the Middle East by General Kopański and his Carpathian Brigade, which fought in the defence of Tobruk. The Poles were highly praised for their courage, spirit of brotherhood, and co-operation in most difficult conditions. It was unfortunate that the Carpathian Brigade, with such a gallant past, had to be disbanded. But this was vital in order to form a new and powerful Polish army in the Middle East, combining soldiers from Russia, from the Brigade and from Scotland. The Carpathian Brigade and soldiers from Scotland were to form the backbone of the new army.

The first evacuation from Russia, which started on 25 March 1942, brought the expected supply of men and women to the planned units. In May and June most new arrivals were transferred by British army transport to camps in Palestine. Able-bodied men and women were called to active service

¹⁴ Brzezicki, *Z Łagru Nachodka*, pp. 128-29.

¹⁵ When the death of General Sikorski in a plane crash off Gibraltar was announced, two weeks of national mourning was ordered. Sikorski had been regarded by Polish exiles from Russia as their saviour. During the time of mourning, black armbands were worn as a sign of personal grief, and dances and leisure activities were suspended for this period in all Polish centres.

There was also a special 'commemoration' of General Berling's betrayal. The organization of a separate Polish army in Russia, under the command of General Berling was an unexpected and humiliating blow. It was widely thought traitorous that a high-ranking Polish officer, with full knowledge of the perversities of Soviet life, should have entered the service of Stalin.

and those under age joined the 'Junak' units, preparing for active service later. On 3 May 1942 in Qastina, Palestine, the newcomers from Russia officially merged with the Carpathian Brigade, creating a new unit, called the 3rd Carpathian Rifles Division, retaining all the traditions of the former Carpathian Brigade.

At that time Palestine became the centre of cultural and political life of Polish war *émigrés*. Together with old exiles from Hungary and Romania there were now officers dismissed from the army, families of those serving in the army and some of the exiles from Russia. Next to the offices run by the Polish government, were the cultural and educational army centres and 'Junak' training centres. A significant number of books were published as were various pamphlets and leaflets for the use of Polish schools and Polish readers at large. Relations with the local Jews were good as both Poles and Jews faced the same enemy: the Germans. From August 1942, with British permission, the Jews started to organize national defence units, which encouraged some Polish Jews to desert from the Polish army.¹⁶

On 15 August 1942 the Polish army in the Middle East numbered 40,148 men including 2,362 Auxiliary Women and Nurses, 1,481 'Junaks' and eight civil servants.¹⁷ The second evacuation ending 1 September 1942 supplemented their numbers.

On 12 September 1942 General Sikorski issued an order in which the Polish army was named 'The Polish army in the East', with General Anders as the army's Commander-in-Chief. Immediately after, in Iraq, 140 miles north-east of Baghdad, the last phase of the re-organization of the army began, its headquarters being situated in the small settlement of Quizil Ribat. The new formation had to fuse three different types of men, moulded by differing experiences, into one unit.

The group of Poles from Britain, nicknamed the 'Lords', had led a relatively good and comfortable life. They could scarcely imagine the horrific experiences of those coming out of Russia. The political infights in the camps and Polish communities in Scotland had corrupted them to some extent and made them cynical.

The Carpathian Brigade consisted of men, nicknamed 'Pharaohs' from their time in Egypt, who had proved themselves in battle with the Germans and Italians, and holding themselves in high esteem. They were the only Polish unit which had served on the battle front and thus representing the whole nation. Their participation in the war was highly motivated and they felt themselves to be ambassadors of Poland. The social structure of the Brigade was enriched by poets, writers, painters, musicians, artists and scientists, creating their own literature and newsletters. Moreover, the Brigade represented the whole of Poland as its soldiers came from all parts of the country.¹⁸ The Poles from the Soviet Union, nicknamed 'Buzuluks', were in poor physical shape, tormented by painful memories of prison, concentration

¹⁶ *Polskie Siły Zbrojne*, pp. 308-09.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 308.

¹⁸ Marian Łozinski, *Pnechodnin powiedz Polsce*, Kraków, 1972, pp. 70, 71.

camps and lost families and friends. Most of them, though, were faithful to their religious and national ideals, which, in atrocious conditions, helped them to preserve their personal dignity and national identity.¹⁹

These disparities led to humiliating encounters on many occasions. The Poles who had arrived from the Soviet Union often experienced the contempt of their countrymen from Britain or the Middle East on account of their emaciated bodies. Remarks made by enrolling officers such as: 'next corpse for the army' were often heard and caused considerable pain. Within a few months, however, differences became insignificant and the fusion of old and new elements made the Polish army in the East highly effective. The new coat of arms — a Carpathian fir-tree on a red and white background fixed to their battledress — helped to smooth out differences and resulted in the British coining a new and readily accepted name for the Polish forces, 'the Christmas Tree Division'.²⁰ The spiritual values of the arrivals from the Soviet camps were also an important and unifying element.

Polish organizing bodies in the Middle-East had to find safe places of refuge and schooling for the children and adolescents. The chronically sick and elderly also had to be re-located. The numbers were significant: out of 113,000 exiles leaving Russia, there were 13,000 children. The first evacuation brought 3,000 children to Persia and the second one about 10,000. Plans for dispersing and organizing accommodation and education for such a large group had to be drawn up in a short time.

Isfahan, in Persia, was one of the places chosen mostly for orphans, and in time it held about 2,000 children. Palestine accommodated over 1,000. Africa admitted over 17,000 Poles of whom half were children. In India, orphanages and camps for mothers with children held 4,000. 1,405 Poles, including 800 children, were sent to Mexico.²¹ New Zealand received 736 children and 105 adults. Groups of students went to the Lebanon and some children to Egypt.

East Africa — Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa, which were then legally British territories, and Zaire (Belgian Congo) — accepted most of the refugees: 17,000 in all. But it was a continent which they feared. For them it was an unknown country with an unusual climate and wild animals. Little was known of its history, and its population, allegedly, consisted of 'savage' tribes, so, there were cases of rebellion and need for police intervention. Careful preparation of the transfer, however, changed people's attitudes, as lack of information had been at the root of their fears. Informative and exhaustive lectures were arranged which calmed uncertainties about their future in Africa.

The Polish settlements and camps in Africa were dispersed over large areas of the continent and divided one from the other by many hundreds of miles.²² In Uganda there were two camps: Masindi (4,000) and Koja (3,000);

¹⁹ Pobóg-Malinowski, *Historia Polityczna Polski*, pp. 286-87.

²⁰ Mieczysław Młotek, *Trzecia Dywizja Strzelców Karpackich*, London, 1978, p. 20.

²¹ *Isfahan miasto Polskich dzieci*, p. 144.

²² Polish priests working in East Africa's Polish settlements:

Uganda: Fr Gruza, Fr Piekarczyk, Fr Janus, Fr Szklany, Fr F.Górka, Fr E.Winczewski, Fr Stopa

Kenya had five: Rongai, Nairobi, Manira, Makindu and Nyali. Tanzania, six: Tengeru, Kigoma, Kondoa, Morogoro, Ifunda (800), Kidugala (1,000). Zaire had one, Abercorn (600). Zambia had four: Bwana M. Kubwa, Fort Jameson, Lusaka, Livingstone. Zimbabwe had three: Rusape (600), Marandellas, Digllefold. South Africa had one: Oudtshoorn. All together there were twenty-two camps or settlements.

The social background of the adults accompanying the children differed from those in the army. A relatively small percentage had higher education and many of them, due to their age or sickness, could not participate in work demanding great physical strength and resistance to the debilitating climate. However, there were teachers and nurses in sufficient numbers and with excellent spiritual and intellectual qualities. For twenty-two camps there were eighteen priests serving as chaplains and teachers of religion.²³ The actual number of priests was supplemented, in some places, by Polish Missionaries or Polish nuns working at the Missions, so that most places had adequate pastoral care.

These priests ministered to all Polish exiles in East Africa, thus changing their parishes, and even countries, where the need arose. These changes are not marked in the above register of chaplains.

The twenty-two Polish settlements had a total of 19,000 inhabitants, including some 3,500 men of advanced age, incapable of military service; over 6,000 women, approximately 8,000 school-age children, among them about 1,500 adolescent girls. In other words, children and young people made up about half the camp's population.

The camps varied in size, and could accommodate from 350 to 4,000 persons.²⁴

In the twenty-two camps there were fifty-seven schools, including twenty-one primary schools, seven secondary ones with a broad-based curriculum, thirteen technical schools, and several specializing in art. Older girls could enrol for courses in sewing, embroidery, basket-weaving and domestic science. Graduating students could enter teaching college. The education and care of the children in the settlements were mostly in the hands of women. The ratio of men to women was sixty per cent women to ten per cent men and thirty per cent children.²⁵ In classes for young children this was a great asset as it led to tender and loving care. Adolescents, on the other hand, needed a

Tanzania (formerly Tanganika): Fr Benedetto Barbaronelli (an Italian who had learnt Polish), Fr B.Godlewski, Fr J.Maciaszek, Fr Jan Sajewicz, Fr Esebro, Fr W.Krawczyk, Fr Zenon Wierzbicki, Fr Dziduszko, Canon Dr Jan Śliwowski, Fr P.Rogiński, Fr J.Sajewicz, Fr Królikowski, Fr Mikołaj Bozerianow (an Orthodox priest).

Kenya: Fr W.Ślępa, Fr Górka.

Zambia (formerly Northern Rhodesia): Fr F.Kubiński, Fr B.Wolnik, Fr Szmania, Fr Wargowski, Fr Drobny, Fr A.Staroborski

Zaire (formerly Belgian Congo): Fr W.Olszewski, Fr A.Wierzbicki, Fr Szyszko.

Zimbabwe (formerly Southern Rhodesia): Fr W.Myszkowski, Fr Z.Burgielski, Fr Siemaszko.

Southern Africa: Fr Czerniecki, Fr F.Kukliński, Fr Lamiński.

23 Krolikowski, *Stolen Childhood*, p. 86.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 85.

25 B.M. Pancewicz, *Harcerstwo w Afryce*, London, 1985, p. 4.

stronger, more authoritative figure; under the care of women they often became uncontrollable.²⁶ An additional factor was their horrifying experiences in Russia, which frequently resulted in personality problems.²⁷ Help and guidance were provided by Dr Szyryński, a medical practitioner specializing in psychiatry, who regularly visited the Polish settlements.²⁸

Elderly soldiers and officers, discharged from the army, were sent to settlements in Africa with the order to offer their help should this prove necessary. They often had a high opinion of themselves due to past military achievements. Indeed, some of them were distinguished and proved to be helpful. But not all. A number of these ex-soldiers were also drunkards and immoral.²⁹ Instead of helping they caused new problems for the regular staff of the settlements, who were already overloaded with work.

To keep things running smoothly, those in charge had to give generously of their time and talent:

... If the Polish schools in Africa did a satisfactory job (and in the opinion of many they did, despite all obstacles, difficulties, and organizational shortages) they did so thanks to the people who were so totally devoted to the children and so self-denying as to be heedless of the inordinate drain on their time, strength, and energy ...³⁰

In these Polish schools children and young people:

... wanted to make up for their losses in learning and upbringing and, most importantly, had idealistic attitudes towards life and a high degree of morality, in spite of all their unpleasant experiences Many of them, after leaving Africa proved their mental maturity in many occupations in workshops, in offices, in the teaching profession, and in commerce. Many received university education in other countries, often with distinction. But their greatest attainment, which enhanced their adult lives wherever they happened to land, was the good character they managed to shape despite so many adversities.³¹

India was the second country accepting a large group of Polish children, the elderly and sick. From the beginning of 1942 groups of Polish children with their tutors, including the Polish priest Father Pluta, started arriving in India from Russia. The first and extremely hospitable place for over 500 children was prepared by the local maharaja Jam Sahab and his wife. The Polish camp was situated in Balachadi near the town of Jamnagar in the Kalahwar peninsula. Life in the camp was spartan, but the care extended to the children was exceptionally warm and loving. 'Polish children are no longer orphans, I will be their father' said the maharaja, and, indeed, the children called him 'Our maharaja' or 'baba', which in Gujarati means father.³²

²⁶ Krolkowski, *Stolen Childhood*, p. 18.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 99-100.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 277.

The chaplain and superintendent of the camp was Father Pluta. The modicum of discipline which he imposed together with the caring atmosphere, allowed the children's life to regain a semblance of normality after the years of deprivation and horror. They responded to these conditions splendidly and after four years, the maharaja said these words of farewell: 'Over the four years of your stay here I have never heard any complaints or grievances against you. We all enjoyed your stay with us.'³³

In Balachadi there was a primary school for 230 children, a nursery, and a small high school as the older children were able to study at local English schools. The climate of Balachadi, however, was unpleasant and a number of children developed pulmonary problems and had to be sent to a convalescent home in the hills where the climate was more beneficial to their health.

Karachi was the transit camp for about 25,000 Poles who were being directed to different parts of the world. For those staying longer in the camp an orphanage and primary school were essential. The primary school had 1,300 children and older ones were sent to local English schools. The chaplains were Fathers Jankowski and Jagielnicki.

In Valivade, near the Portuguese colony of Goa, a settlement for 5,000 Poles sprang up. It was well organized with its own church, hospital, theatre, shops and schools. There were five primary schools with 1,250 children, a large nursery and four high schools. The total number of pupils was 2,000. In the orphanage there were 400 children. The pastoral duties were entrusted to Fathers L. Dolinger, K. Kozłowski, Przybysz, K. Bobrowski, Koreński and Brother Orysiuk.³⁴

The Valivade settlement provided good care for families, and for the first time since their deportation to Russia each family enjoyed separate accommodation. The quarters were simple and somewhat primitive, built to Indian rather than European standards, yet they provided much-needed privacy. A large percentage of people had received higher education (one quarter), so all posts in the schools and nursery were easily filled. They built a church, organized theatrical performances, opened shops and even printed a Polish paper *Polak w Indiach* (The Pole in India). The only problem, as in Africa, was a lack of male teachers and parents, to work with juveniles.

Mexico admitted over 1,400 Poles, including about 800 children.³⁵ The Polish settlement was in Santa Rosa, near the township of Leon in Central Mexico. First a nursery was opened, next a primary school for 500 children, then a high school and technical college. The chaplains in the settlement were Fathers Józef Jarzębowski, Jagielnicki and J. Szurek.

The staff, especially those teaching in schools, and the priests worked extremely hard to maintain standards. The quality of teaching was very high and the degree of co-operation and sense of responsibility among the students were most encouraging. The students were prepared to extend their time at

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 279.

³⁴ Kamil Barański, *W Trzy Strony Świata*, Hove, 1991, pp. 25-27.

³⁵ A. Jacewicz, *Santa Rosa*, London, 1965, pp. 30, 38.

school to master difficult subjects and were ready to help less gifted friends. Consequently, exam results were excellent and letters of thanks from universities and places of further education were frequently received.

These positive fruits of life in Santa Rosa helped to diminish the negative influence of unhelpful old politicians, who quarrelled among themselves and wrote acrimonious and untrue articles about the settlement in various Polish papers. These achievements also helped to neutralize the potentially harmful effect of a small group of men and women dismissed from the army and described as 'drunkards and deviants', who had been sent to Santa Rosa by the Polish authorities in exile.³⁶

New Zealand became a refuge for Polish children quite by accident. A ship taking Polish children to Mexico stopped on the way at a New Zealand port. The children were seen by a representative of the Red Cross, a Polish woman, as it happened, and news about their horrifying experiences in Russia and their present sad condition reached the wife of the Prime Minister, Mrs Frazer, and the Archbishop of Wellington, the Most Rev. O'Shea. As a result of their intervention, New Zealand's government opened the way for the Polish children to a new country.

On 1 November 1944, 755 children accompanied by 105 adults arrived in Wellington. They settled in an old army camp, which had been specially prepared for their arrival, and thus 'The Polish Children's Camp in Pahiatua — The Little Poland' was created. At first, a nursery, two primary schools, a high school and a technical college were established. Later a library, a theatre, a hospital and workshops were added. Father M. Wilniewiczyc was both chaplain and teacher of religion.

'Little Poland', so warmly welcomed by the highest authorities, was soon to run into difficulties concerning the running of its own affairs. The hospitality of the New Zealanders was not a matter of simple and pure altruism. In exchange they expected the gratitude of the Polish orphans and subordination to their rules whose main aim was assimilation. This was to embrace the language and national and religious traditions — all the elements which were so lovingly cultivated by both old and young Poles, but which, with the assimilation of the children a top priority, were considered unnecessary and even an impediment. The number of Polish lessons was deemed harmful to the learning of the English language and therefore it was considered that they should be limited. Polish history and celebration of national anniversaries were allegedly immersing the children in a 'fictional' past and not in the more important aspects of present life and therefore should be phased out.

Polish religious traditions, such as the public celebration of the feast of Corpus Christi with a Eucharistic procession around the camp, was not to the liking of New Zealanders working there, who preferred to celebrate the day in a more secular manner. It also met with the opposition of the Catholic Archbishop of Wellington. This lack of understanding led to unhappiness and

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 30, 34-35.

conflict between the New Zealanders working in the camp and Father Wilniewiczyc and also the camp's Polish 'intelligentsia'. There was even talk about persecution of the Poles in the camp and articles in the Polish press in Europe. The sermons preached by Father Wilniewiczyc in the local chapel also included allusions to this state of affairs.³⁷ The conflict was caused by a well-intentioned yet somewhat underhand plan for a speedy assimilation, which the hospitable New Zealanders wished to carry out for the good of the children. Unfortunately, the Polish staff in charge of the orphans did not state sufficiently clearly that the children accepted the hospitality on a temporary basis only and that they desired to remain Polish.

Poles and Jews in Palestine

At the outbreak of war, Poles and Jews faced the same enemy. The Germans attacked Poland and directed their blows and the force of their propaganda also against the Jews. For many Poles, the necessity of having a country which Jews could call their own was indispensable. Relations between Jews and Poles in Palestine were at this time friendly. The exodus of the Poles from Russia, however, soon changed this situation. First of all, Palestinian Jews questioned the allegedly small number of Polish Jews in the Polish army. General Bohusz-Szyszko was, in this case, attacked personally as the person responsible for this fact. Yet 4,000 Jews in the army, 1,000 civilians and over 800 orphans was no meagre number.

It is well to remember that the Jews in Palestine were cleverly manipulated by the powerful Soviet intelligence service. Jewish society was enthusiastic about the Soviet Union, about life in Russia and about Stalin, and accepted much of their propaganda without question. Soviet collaborators in the Jewish and Polish communities sowed discord among Poles and Jews by disseminating false information. They told the Poles that the Jews were ready to co-operate with the enemies of Poland, whereas the Jews were informed that the Poles were anti-Semites. The time was indeed ripe to create an atmosphere of distrust and suspicion. Newly-organized Polish nationalist groups, small yet vociferous, also helped to poison Polish-Jewish relations.

The second reason for discord was more serious and deeply hurt the Poles. This was the attempt of underground Jewish organizations in Palestine to persuade Jews serving in the Polish army to desert. They needed more men with military training to reinforce their own units in their far-reaching plans of subduing Palestine, so for them the Polish Jews were easy prey. The Polish Jews had immediately adapted themselves to life in Palestine, where they felt at home: this was not Russia, Poland or the Polish army but 'their' Palestine.³⁸ With the help of their biblical schooling they intimately knew all the biblical places and their historical associations.

³⁷ Theresa Sawicka-Brockie, *Forsaken Journeys: the Polish Experience and Identity of the Pahiatua Children in New Zealand*, Auckland, 1987 (unpublished PhD thesis), pp. 325-41.

³⁸ Brzezicki, *Z Łagru Nachodka*, p. 166.

Desertion from the Polish army, especially in wartime, was despicable, the worst act any soldier could commit. So, by deserting, the Polish Jews caused havoc in the ranks of army units. The constant need for replacement of personnel and consequent changes were not good for the morale of the army. For example, the well-publicized tour of the Polish army orchestra had to be suddenly cancelled as a direct result of the desertion of so many Jewish musicians.³⁹ Similar cases affected relations with the Jews in Palestine and there were personal, bitter, sometimes violent reactions to these hurtful and humiliating incidents.

Not all, however, deserted. Out of 4,000 Jews in the Polish army 3,000 left the army, but an estimated 1,000 remained in the army, serving honourably to the end of the war. The Polish army was pressed by the British to court-marshal Jewish deserters, but refused to co-operate as the Polish Jews were Poles and Jews. General Anders did not force anybody to serve and fight in the Polish army, neither did he permit Jewish deserters to be prosecuted.⁴⁰ But bitterness, in many cases, remained.

Polish-Jewish relations, however, were not entirely bad. The Poles noticed that in all the violent Jewish attacks against the British, Polish soldiers and Polish dwellings were spared.⁴¹ The Command of the Jewish underground army no doubt had some understanding and appreciation of Polish attitudes.

Palestine was a country of special significance not only to the Jews, but to the Poles also. They too had the biblical knowledge which helped them to feel at home there. They knew the Holy Land well: the mountains, lakes, biblical towns and they respected and loved them. Large groups of Poles were regularly seen visiting the holy places. In certain ways Poles felt an affinity with Jews, as did many Jews with the Poles. Even those Poles who generally disliked Jews as a group could be friendly to those individuals whom they knew well. In Siberia:

not only the Jews but Catholics also gathered together in a hut for the (Jewish) service. The service began with the solemn prayer 'Kol Nidrei'. The words of the prayer were mixed with tears, as everyone was crying. The Catholics knelt and prayed — maybe this was the first time that Catholics and Jews prayed together in the Siberian taiga. Everyone's prayers were very intense, ecstatic. After the service one of the Catholics intoned the hymn 'Boże coś Polske' (Oh, God who has protected Poland throughout the Ages) and everyone joined in.⁴²

M. Buchweitz came to Kermine to join the Polish army. There he met a man, whom he had known in the past: 'I would like to enlist in the Polish army, but I am a Jew, and I have heard that Jews are not admitted.' 'For Jews such as you there is always a place in the army.' So, he was admitted without

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

⁴⁰ Pobóg-Malinowski, *Historia Polityczna Polski*, p. 209.

⁴¹ Brzezicki, *Z Łagru Nachodka*, p. 166.

⁴² Anna and Norbert Kant, *Extermination. Killing Poles in Stalin's Empire*, London, 1991, p. 39.

the usual formalities and check-ups.⁴³ The Polish Jews exiled to Russia, when questioned about their choice of country on their return, voted for Poland.⁴⁴

Dr Teresa Lipkowska, a devout Roman-Catholic, who in 1942 decided to remain in Israel for good and make it her second home, writes on this subject in biographical notes. She comments on the similarities between Polish and Jewish aristocratic families — an idea which had already been voiced in pre-war Poland:

- the first similarity is a deep knowledge and love of one's origin, one's genealogy.
- the second is a religiosity shown to the outside world, even by those who are not themselves religious.
- the third similarity is patriotism and a strong bond with one's country of origin.
- the fourth is the significance of education in human life.
- the fifth similarity is a respect towards parents and the elderly.⁴⁵

These values, which formed an integral part of the Polish aristocracy's attitude to life, historians⁴⁶ today would extend to the entire Polish population, who adapted the culture though not the ideology of the upper classes of Poland to its own life.

How then does one account for Polish anti-Semitism? Dr Lipkowska's answer: Polish anti-Semitism has nothing to do with any form of racism, but is rooted in jealousy concerning the status of a chosen nation, elected by God. This may explain the fact that when Poles and Jews work together, they usually co-operate well in the field of culture and business. It may explain, also, the fact that 3,000 Jewish deserters in Palestine were allowed to go free to build the state of Israel. Without doubt, the Poles, helped in this way to build this state. This may also explain the fact that there were no Polish-Jewish religious conflicts in Palestine.

Pastoral Work

The re-organization of the Polish army, including families with children accompanying the army, orphans and the elderly or those dismissed from units, was very successful. Sending thousands of people to different countries, organizing hundreds of schools and various institutions caring for both young and old, demonstrated the formidable organizational ability of the Polish Government in London and its officials. Priests were deeply involved in this survival activity of the nation.

Up till then, all their work among civilians had been co-ordinated with the endeavours of army chaplains. Now they had to specialize. Some limited their

⁴³ Kazimierz Zamorski, *Dwa Tajne biura Drugiego Korpusu*, London, 1990, p. 58.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 103-04.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 126-29.

⁴⁶ Stefan Kieniewicz, *Historyk a świadomość narodowa*, Warsaw, 1982, pp. 21-22.

work to army units only, where they were chaplains. Those attached to schools or orphanages had to be educationalists and teachers of religion in addition to their priestly duties. Lack of staff forced them to stand in for many other professions needed in the camps, including even the role of policemen.

Priests serving in the army had behind them a long tradition of army chaplaincy and so guidelines as to how they should perform their duties. Priests teaching religion in large city schools were also accustomed to their conditions of work. But the situations facing those sent to Africa, New Zealand, Mexico or India were totally new. They had to live in countries where they were isolated from other large Polish groups and the Polish army. The demand for their ministry in such groups and their high morale gave priests the incentive to cultivate the Polish way of life. However, the climate of those countries, and the low standard of life, with the exception of New Zealand, contributed to their hardships. Certain groups of ex-servicemen, some of them drunkards and displaying other immoral habits, used the children's camps as a well-deserved place of retirement, and thus increased the problems already facing the priests. Yet, undeterred, they adapted themselves to these conditions.

In some camps they had to build a chapel or church, acting as both priests and building labourers. Father Winczewski, with the help of his countrymen, built a brick church in the camp where huts for the inhabitants were made of clay and the roofing of grass. The church was offered to God as a sign of gratitude for their release from Russia.⁴⁷ Father Dziduszko also started to build a church, the work being continued and finished by his successor Father Jan Śliwowski. The latter added a presbytery, a beautiful garden surrounding the church and recreation hall. Canon Francis Kubieński, assigned to a drab ex-army camp, planted a garden with large bushes which provided shade on hot days and also established a large vegetable garden supplying the camps kitchen. Through his efforts he changed the camp beyond recognition.⁴⁸ In many camps, priests not only organized but also acted as guides on excursions into the country, to the mountains, to exotic zoos and places of interest.

They all felt responsible for the moral welfare of the people in the camps. They were especially concerned about the children. Some of them, after their traumatic experiences in Russia, were emotionally disturbed, distrusting authority and inclined to petty offences. They did not actually destroy property or attack people, but they were tempted to steal. 'Normal' children also had their own problems:

The hot climate, the inactivity, the abnormal social conditions, and the closeness of the huts constantly threatened to undermine the moral resolve of certain young people, but their teachers and their priests were always there to strengthen them.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Krolikowski, *Stolen Childhood*, p. 92.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

To ensure the safety of the community, priests had to take special precautions. Father Rogiński was well known for his habit of patrolling the camp at night with a powerful torch to chase the youngsters home. Using his gift of persuasion he could bring the offenders back to the church and daily prayers.⁵⁰ His love of the children sometimes led him to take strong action against those who abused them. Once he confronted an elderly man who was trying to assault sexually young girls, and in the absence of any policing authority he himself painfully punished the offender.

The religious practices organized by chaplains were an important element influencing children in the formative years of their life. Confession, attended regularly from childhood, served not only as absolution from sin in strictly theological terms, but also as a way of counselling and guiding penitents in an atmosphere of absolute confidence and secrecy. All priests, as part of their duties as chaplains, served in the chapels as confessors. Father Jan Sliwowski's duties were particularly arduous yet rewarding:

Before each first Friday of the month he was there in the confessional five days a week, from one o'clock in the afternoon till midnight, sometimes longer, and in the morning just before Holy Mass. Before the high holidays more than three thousand penitents confessed and on Easter day or Christmas, Father Jan distributed the Holy Host to an average of twelve thousand.⁵¹

Contact with the Polish Missionaries in Africa made a considerable impression on many children. The Missionaries, both priests and religious sisters, were overjoyed to meet Polish children in their areas and in no time they befriended them, helping them as best they could. An accurate analysis of the life of Poles in the Middle East and Africa shows the joint and complementary efforts of educationalists and priests in the care of even the youngest victims of the Soviet labour camps and prisons. In the process of healing psychological injuries of orphaned and abused children, priests were not only helpful but, in truth, irreplaceable.

The Polish Forces in Italy

The formation of a new Polish army, combining the exiles from Russia, the Carpathian Brigade and soldiers from Scotland, was completed in June 1943. General Sikorski, when visiting them on 13 June, was most pleased with the way they presented themselves and their morale. His tragic death in no way dampened their resolve to liberate Poland and his successor as commander in charge, the newly appointed General Sosnkowski, did his utmost to speed up training of the soldiers in the new army.

They now faced a new challenge, involving the ability to co-ordinate their skills in handling new weaponry with learning to drive and repair vehicles such as tanks, trucks and cars. Destined for the war in Italy, the Polish army had to train in the Syrian and Lebanese mountains and soon important

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

manoeuvres in the middle of October 1943, in which both Polish and British forces were engaged, proved that the Poles were ready to move to the front line. At the same time, the enormous task of training technicians for the transport and armoured units was in full swing. By the end of November the army had prepared over 30,000 drivers, mechanics and technicians of various kinds. The great military parade in Nuseirat on 11 November 1943, with General Anders present, gave a visible demonstration of the splendid results of months of hard work.

One problem, though, was yet to be solved: how would the army be reinforced in case of heavy losses of manpower in battle? General Sosnkowski stated that reinforcements should be supplied by Polish POWs, who had been forcibly conscripted by the Germans in Poland. British commanders accepted General Sosnkowski's project with some incredulity. General Wilson promised General Anders to transport all Polish POWs from the German army to special camps under his command.

General Sosnkowski inspected the Polish units in Lydda (Palestine) on 13 November. The following day, when visiting the basilica in Jerusalem, he placed on the Tomb of Christ his own medal, the 'Virtuti Militari' cross, which was the highest military decoration in Poland, asking God for a successful outcome to these plans.

Under the command of General Bohusz-Szyszko, the army units with all their equipment now moved to Egyptian ports: the men to Port Said and heavy equipment to Alexandria, where they embarked. The journey to Italy was a hazardous venture due to the dangers from German and Italian submarines lurking in Mediterranean waters. In consequence, the shipment of all the units lasted four months, from the middle of December 1943 up until the middle of April 1944.

Those arriving at Taranto in January, their equipment having been delivered to Brindisi and Bari, took over the section of the front line on the river Sangro from the eighth British army. Unfortunately, the winter temperatures and heavy snowfalls limited their scope for action, yet those conditions enabled them to adapt slowly to the new climate and terrain. Units arriving later extended the terrain covered by the Polish army to sixty kilometres.

General Anders was strongly opposed to certain British strategists who wanted to send the newly-arrived units to different parts of the country, which would have resulted in Poles fighting in isolation from other units of the Polish army. In the opinion of General Anders, Poles had to fight as one. During these strategical changes in the Polish army, the General Command of the Allied forces in the Mediterranean area replaced General Eisenhower with General Wilson and General Montgomery with General O. Leese. General Alexander remained in charge of the Italian front for the time being.

On 24 March Commanders of the Second US army and the British Eighth army met General Anders in Vinciatiuro. The strategical plan to advance on Rome was not progressing. The main hindrance was the German defence lines straddling Monte Cassino, where the old Benedictine Monastery was situated.

Three attempts to destroy them had failed. The first was carried out from 22 January to 10 February with the participation of the American Fifth army, Algerians from the French Corps and Britain's Eighth army. The second and third were launched on 15 February by the New Zealand Corps, with the help of Hindus and Gurkas, and lasted till 24 March.⁵² About five to six brigades of attacking Allied troops — Americans, British, New Zealanders, Hindus, Gurkas and Algerians — were repulsed by the Germans. General Anders was requested to accomplish this dangerous and difficult task with the Polish Second Corps. Ten minutes were sufficient to make a positive decision. The Poles would open the road to Rome.

The arrival of the last transport of Polish forces in April enabled the plan to be put into operation. The Polish army was now ready to fully enter the theatre of war in Italy. It consisted of two divisions: the Carpathian and the Kresowa, a brigade of tanks, an artillery unit, a reconnaissance regiment, and a battalion of sappers and communication personnel. In total there were 50,000 soldiers, including 3,099 officers and 559 from the Womens' Auxiliary Service.⁵³ Between 11 and 14 April Polish units moved from the river Sangro line to new positions, where they prepared to start a new and difficult operation. Total secrecy helped the Polish army to take up positions at the foot of Monte Cassino, in Villa and places already under the control of the British Eighth army.

The American Second Corps was positioned on the shores of the Thyrrhenian Sea. Further to the north-east was the French Corps, further still the Canadian Corps in contact with the British Thirteenth Corps, which had the Poles on its right wing. On their right wing was the British Tenth Corps. Support from the artillery of the British and American army was organized. The air force was on call. Ammunition, fuel and provisions were transported to the places closest to the area of the planned attack.

The Poles did not follow the tactics adopted by the previously defeated brigades; they did not assail the Monastery directly. General Anders and his military advisors chose a somewhat longer and harder track up to the Colle San Angelo and Hill 593, but one which might render the last leg of the operation, taking over the Monastery, a more realistic proposition. The route from Villa followed a narrow and winding path to the Colle San Angelo and Hill 593 and then on to Hill 569. The tanks and jeeps driving up there and damaged on the way had no chance of turning back, and had to be pulled off the road and dumped into the abyss, the whole operation being carried out under enemy fire. The Germans had a good view of all approaches to Monte Angelo from the top of Monte Caira, Monte Cassino and Monte Cifalco, which dominated the area. The artillery and snipers, positioned with great precision in all strategic places, could systematically pick off attacking soldiers. The mountains and hills were riddled with bunkers, armed with artillery, machine-

⁵² Józef Garliński, *Poland in the Second World War*, London, 1985 (hereafter *Poland in WW2*), pp. 251-52.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

guns and flamethrowers, and connected by underground corridors and safe passages both for communication and as supply lines for the the German troops. The smallest mountain tracks were full of personnel mines. The officers and soldiers defending the mountains were the élite of the German army. Monte Cassino was, in the eyes of the Germans, impregnable.

On 11 May, after a heavy artillery barrage, the Polish Second Corps moved its units to their chosen positions. This was the day the Poles had been waiting for. Words used to describe those days seem theatrical and exaggerated, but at the time, at the height of the battle, they indeed voiced the deep and genuine emotions of the soldiers. The Poles saw this battle as a way of expressing their love for their mother country, and seized this chance to prove that they were ready to fight, suffer and die for its freedom. A dying officer writes to his young son that he offers him the best possible present: the testimony of a father who died for his country.⁵⁴ The same message was conveyed by other dying soldiers to their loved ones.

This was also a time of revenge for occupied Poland, for murdered families, millions of dead in concentration camps, years of terror and the destruction of a nation and its cultural and material treasures. The Germans, knowing this, expected the Poles to be without mercy, and so instructed the soldiers that Poles did not take prisoners of war. However, this was not borne out in fact. Poles did indeed take prisoners. The German General H. Hoppe in charge of 278th Rifle Division writes on this subject, stating that the Poles fought with courage and chivalry, abiding by international war conventions.⁵⁵

The intensity of the battle across a terrain four to six kilometres wide and about eight kilometres long was immense. Day and night the mountains were covered by smoke from the artillery and smoke-candles used by the Polish units to mask the movements of the army. The bodies of the soldiers, dead and wounded, were terribly mutilated. The heavy smell of decaying human and animal flesh resulted in many being overcome by extreme nausea. A warm meal was merely a dream as the smallest fire would attract an artillery barrage. Only the rats, banqueting on the dead bodies, seemed happy and without any worries.

Support units had to supply the fighting troops with ammunition, fuel, water and food rations. They performed their duties in an exemplary way, frequently at the cost of their own lives. In these atrocious conditions they transported into the mountains 1,400,000 litres of petrol, 500,000 artillery shells, water and 340,000 food rations.⁵⁶ The wounded and dead had to be removed, when possible, from the front line. This again required heroic action by the first-aid service and medical staff. Transporting wounded men from such rocky and hilly terrain, under artillery fire, was almost impossible. Yet it had to be done.

⁵⁴ Melchior Wankowicz, *Monte Cassino!*, Warsaw, 1984, pp. 113-14.

⁵⁵ *Działania 2 Korpusu we Włoszech*, London, 1963, t. I, p. 323.

⁵⁶ Tadeusz Radwański, *Karpatczykami nas zwali*, Warsaw, 1978, p. 198.

On 18 May 1944 Polish troops captured Monte Cassino. Captain Herbert Bayer, in charge of the German troops, surrendered to Officer Cadet Dionizy Dąbrowski and later with his twenty-five remaining troops capitulated to Lieutenant Stefan Leśniak. One hundred German paratroopers escaped to the British side of the mountain, apparently to avoid facing the Poles. Over the ruins of the Monastery Poles hung Polish and British flags and a solitary trumpeter played the well-known Polish tune 'Hejnał Marjacki'.⁵⁷

On 25 May, General Alexander, when decorating General Anders (commander of the Polish forces during the battle for Monte Cassino) with the Order of the Bath on behalf of the British king, said:

My King has decorated the Commander of the Polish 2nd Corps, giving him the Order of the Bath for the Polish soldiers' extraordinary courage, spirit of self-sacrifice and a readiness to surrender one's life. It was a great and glorious day for Poland when the Polish army captured the fortress, which in German eyes was impregnable ... Soldiers of the Polish 2nd Corps! If ever I had a chance to choose the best men to command, I would select you, Polish soldiers.⁵⁸

Hill 593 became a Polish cemetery. On the memorial obelisk, dominating the cemetery, a Polish inscription says: 'For your freedom and ours we, Polish Soldiers, have offered to God — our Spirit, to the Italian soil — our Body and our Heart to Poland.'

The losses of the Second Polish Corps were considerable: the Carpathian Division lost 1,571 soldiers, of whom over twenty per cent were killed, the Kresowa more still 2,174 men, of whom twenty-two per cent were lost in battle. Seventy-two officers were killed, including one brigade commander and two battalion leaders, and there were 209 wounded.⁵⁹

The conquest of Monte Cassino gave no respite to the Polish troops. Monte Cairo and neighbouring hills were still in the hands of heavily armed German forces, so the exhausted Polish troops had to give chase to the Germans to stop them regrouping. Monte Cairo was captured on 25 May, and the same day, the Germans surrendered to the Second Corps at Piedmont. Now, finally, was the time for a short rest and the re-organization of units considerably depleted by losses in battle.

In the first days of June the Second Corps moved on to guard the Adriatic coast, yet, very soon, the Polish army was ordered to go to Ancona. The subsequent capture of Loretto, and the liquidation of the German troops there, strategically facilitated the attack on Ancona. After the battle which lasted over two weeks Ancona was captured by the Poles on 18 July. The capture of 3,000 German POWs and a large amount of war materials, as well as the opening of the port to Allied ships, was a compensation to the Polish troops for the the death and injuries endured by its soldiers. In June and July the

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 286-89.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 291.

⁵⁹ Garliński, *Poland in WW2*, p. 255.

Poles losses in battle amounted to 2,150 soldiers of whom 388 were killed, 1,636 wounded and 126 unidentified.

In further battles with the Germans the Second Corps captured Senigallia, Fano and Pessaro, and then, between 5 and 30 September, they were given a well-deserved rest in the valley of the River Chienti. However, by October they were again engaged in battle with the retreating Germans in the difficult, mountainous terrain of the Appenines. There, the activities of the Polish army and their success in flushing out the Germans were strategically important to the general progress of all the armies. About the end of November, the Second Corps was close to the river Senio, when the onset of snow and winter frost temporarily stopped all war activities.

The number of dead and wounded in the Appenines are proof of the furious battles in the mountains. There were 627 deaths, 2,630 wounded and thirty-two missing — altogether 3,289 soldiers. The Poles had been fighting the élite of the German army. On 23 March 1944 the BBC informed listeners that 'It is beyond doubt that the Germans have concentrated crack troops at Cassino for whom only the very best Allied troops can be a match.'

On 9 April 1945 the Second Corps took part in a new Allied offensive against the Germans. They had to move into the extremely difficult terrain, cross numerous rivers: the Senio, Santerno, Sellustra, Sillaro, Gaiano, Idice and Svena and, on 20 April, they attacked the city of Bologna and captured it on 21 April. As a sign of respect to the courage of the Polish army, General Anders remained in charge of the city and sole representative of the Eighth army. The Poles' losses were 234 dead, 1,228 wounded and seven missing. The total number of Polish soldiers who fell in Italy were 2,197 dead, 8,737 wounded and 264 missing - in all 11,1948.

The Polish army fought against the Germans on the Italian front line. Yet the Poles were also under threat from an unexpected quarter — from their Allies and friends. The British and Americans were undoubtedly under the mendacious influence, and possibly charm, of Joseph Stalin. By invading Germany from the East, he saved not only numerous British and American lives, but he also saved the Allies a considerable amount of money. The Soviet Union's part in the war was of unquestionable benefit to Britain and America, so they were ready to show him gratitude and friendship and offer him something he needed and which for them had no real value. He wanted the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. He wanted Poland. The granting of such a wish seemed to the Allies, to be reasonable and of no cost to themselves.

At the conference in Teheran (28 November to 1 December 1943), after private conversations with Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt agreed on a change of Polish borders, acknowledging the 1939 Ribbentrop-Molotov treaty and enabling Polish territory to be annexed by Russia. They promised Stalin the complete dependence of Poland on the Soviet Union and also gave him Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, the Baltic States, a part of Austria and Yugoslavia, half of East Prussia and the Japanese Kurile Islands. To the Poles this was a downright betrayal by friends. The Polish Government in Exile had

not been consulted and all their objections had been put aside.⁶⁰ The planned short cut to Poland for the Polish army through the Balkans and the Carpathian mountains had definitely been closed. Instead, on 3-4 January 1944, the Russian army crossed the eastern borders of Poland.

At about this time the 2nd Corps was moving all its units from the Middle East to the Italian Peninsula. The memories of Katyń, Soviet concentration camps and prisons were vivid and painful for the soldiers and on their arrival in Italy a shock awaited them. There, the American and British press serving the Allied forces was full of warm feelings of friendship and appeasement towards the Soviet Union and glorified its successes on the eastern battlefields. Furthermore, it was very critical of Poles, who did not appreciate the apparent value of Stalin and his army. For men and women who had personally experienced Stalin's labour camps, Soviet prisons and the horrific conditions in the Soviet Union, this attitude was unbelievable, shameful and painful.

On 6 February 1944, General Anders landed in Italy. On his arrival, he noticed certain articles in the English field newspaper which were most offensive to Poles. He raised the matter at his first meeting with the Commander of the Eighth army, General Leese, as he knew that such articles would infuriate his men. General Leese rebuked him, but having spent some time in close contact with the Poles in battle, the General no doubt understood the problem, and the offending articles vanished from the field press.⁶¹

There were other matters which caused bitterness and fury among the Poles. On 22 February Churchill expressed the opinion in the British Parliament that the British Government supported the Teheran agreement. Churchill's speech, which was widely reported, led to bitter comments by the officers and men of the 2nd Corps. The Poles had not heard such words in 1939, nor during the Battle of Britain, nor in the battle for Tobruk. Yet, now, when the end of the war was close at hand, the British were showing their true nature and perfidy. The distress of the soldiers and, later, the furious and victorious capture of Monte Cassino, possibly gave rise in Churchill's mind to grave suspicions of an armed uprising of the Polish 2nd Corps against the Allies. This may also explain Churchill's sudden visit on 25 August, at the headquarters of the 2nd Corps in Italy, when he inquired about the sensitivities of the soldiers and discussed their current problems, being even moved to tears on one occasion. He was frank about the Polish eastern borders, stating that Britain had never guaranteed them, but, he also requested that the Poles trust Great Britain.⁶²

The Warsaw Uprising was a further cause of great sadness for the 2nd Corps fighting so successfully along the Adriatic coast. They were urgently needed in Poland and here they were involved in battles in Italy, without any

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

⁶¹ Władysław Anders, *Bez ostatniego rozdziału*, Newtown, 1949, p. 210.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 283-88.

opportunity to influence the tragic events in Poland. The words of a Polish broadcast from ruined Warsaw, caused immense pain:

This is the stark truth. We were treated worse than Hitler's satellites, worse than Italy, Romania, Finland. May God, who is just, pass judgement on the terrible injustice suffered by the Polish nation, and may He punish accordingly all those who are guilty.⁶³

The Yalta conference (4-11 February 1945) finalized the absurd end of the Polish tragedy — thousands of friends lost, the loss of families, bloody battles, all their sacrifices had been in vain. Churchill and Roosevelt signed with unbelievable naiveté, without consultation with those involved, a treaty with Stalin, giving him entire countries and nations. The Yalta, and later the Potsdam, agreement had clauses about free elections, which salved the conscience of the Allies, but meant nothing to the Communists. Poland lost fifty per cent of her territory to Russia, and the future Polish Government and its people would be completely dependent on Moscow. Poles had no illusions about the future and their reaction was firm. The soldiers lost all motivation to fight the Germans.

All the soldiers of the Corps had lived through deportation to the Soviet Union and knew the style of life there, and the methods of government. General Anders reacted immediately sending a cable to the President of the Polish Republic with the spontaneous suggestion of withdrawing the Corps from fighting. He also wrote on this matter to the Commander of the Eighth army. Later the General had several conversations on this issue with General Alexander and General Clark, who tried to mitigate the harshness of these political decisions by showing understanding for the Polish drama. The General's departure for London and the discussion of the situation in the Polish political milieu consolidated the view that the army must carry on fighting. A new duty fell to the commander of the Second Corps, as on 26 February the President of Polish Republic entrusted to him the function of Commander-in-Chief.⁶⁴

The battles of the Polish army along the Adriatic coast, in the Apennines and above all the battle for Bologna and the capture of the city on 21 April 1945, were a confirmation of the decision which must have been taken then.

An analysis of military action uncovers both the strength and imperfections of the war machine, the courage of soldiers, the numbers of those fallen or wounded in battle, and the results of plans and orders of commanding officers. Very little is said about building up the morale of the army and then maintaining it in a time of crisis and heavy losses in the fight against the enemy, or even in defeat. Important elements in creating good morale in the army are trusted commanders and a spirit of comradeship in the units. In the Polish army, a further element contributing to the high morale of the soldiers was the work of chaplains who treated their responsibilities with great fervour and commitment.

⁶³ Norman Davies, *God's Playground — A History of Poland*, 2 vols, Oxford, 1981, II, p. 479.

⁶⁴ Garliński, *Poland in WW2*, p. 327.

On 26 March, Bishop Gawlina, who was in charge of all Polish chaplains, arrived in Brindisi by air from London. Evidently, important events were close at hand. Every day there were meetings with the commanding officers and chaplains, visits to those lying wounded in field hospitals as also to cemeteries to pray for soldiers fallen in battle. His diary was full and it may be interesting to scan its contents.

26 March — Mass celebrated with Father Kołodziejczyk and Father Bocheński in attendance. General Sosnkowski decorated certain outstanding soldiers in the presence of the Bishop. Visit to field hospital. Lunch in British Officers Club. Bishop is chief speaker. Visit to four army posts with local chaplain Father Kołodziejczyk.

27 March — Brindisi, Campobasso. Inspection of the units of Fr W. Cieński, in Charge of the Chaplaincy of the 2nd Corps and himself the local chaplain.

28 March — Campobasso. Meeting with local Italian bishop. Conference with Father Cieński. Lunch with General Sosnkowski and General Duch. Meeting with the chaplains: Father Joniec and Father Kiwiński.

29 March — Carpinone. All day visit of army posts under enemy fire, as also the field cemetery.

30 March — Carpinione. All day visit of army posts and local Italian parish church. Meeting with Father Cieński.

31 March — Carpinione. Meeting with Father Joniec and a few army officers. Visit to Chief of Staff office. Meeting with General Sosnkowski, General Anders and General Szarecki. Visit to field hospital; talk in the chapel with personnel. Meeting with Father Zabłudowski.

1 April — Boiano. Conference with Father Cieński and Father Joniec. Visit of local bishop. Help for local churches. Poles offer them eighty per cent of Sunday collections. Meeting with Father Malak.

2 April — Palm Sunday — Boiano. Mass in presence of General Sosnkowski and General Anders. Bishop thanks General Sosnkowski for his deeply religious remarks on many occasions. Telegram from Father Wcisło. Meeting with Father Targosz, Father Malak, Father Dubrawka, Father Judycki, Father Cieński.

3 April — Piedimonte. Meeting of the chaplains of the Eighth army. Bishop Gawlina, Father Cieński and Father Bochertski represented Polish chaplains. Visit to the field cemetery. Meeting with Father Gąsiorski. Visit to the field hospital — a wounded soldier regained consciousness in the presence of Bishop, recognized him and prayed together with him. Confession — Father Cieński and Targosz served as confessors for a number of hours.

4 April — Boiano. Conference with Father Targosz and Father Cieński. Meeting with the local Italian Bishop. Conference with Colonel Perkowicz. Meeting with the local chaplain.

5 April — Boiano. Departure to Campobasso.

6 April — Campobasso. Maundy Thursday. Solemn mass in the chapel celebrated by Bishop with the following priests in attendance: Father Cieński, Father Wróbel,

Father Bocheński, Father Zabłudowski. About three hundred people attended of whom one hundred were Poles. In the evening, conference with Father Cieński and the local chaplain.

7 April — Boiano. Good Friday. Meeting with Father Sławik and Father Malinowski. Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament at Christ's Tomb guarded by armed soldiers according to Polish tradition. Lunch with Gen. Anders. Meeting with local chaplain.

8 April — Boiano. Holy Saturday. Morning Mass celebrated by Bishop with Father Cieński and local chaplain in attendance. Meeting with Father Piotr Sywak. Later, meeting with local Italian clergy. Conference with Father Cieński, Father Joniec and Father Judycki. In the evening, the Bishop blessed the food for Easter Sunday.

9 April — Boiano. Easter Sunday. Solemn field Mass — Generals: Anders, Sulik, Kopański present. Lunch in the army unit. In the evening, a special meeting with the chaplains: Father Cieński, Father Joniec, Father Judycki, Father Malinowski, Father Kiwecki, Father Dubrawka, and the local chaplain.

10 April — Boiano. General Sosnkowski invites General Leese for lunch. Bishop Gawlina, General Anders and General Kopański present. In the afternoon the Bishop, Father Cieński and Father Zabłudowski visit the Polish field theatre.

11 April — Boiano. Meeting with Father Bas. Conference with the local chaplain.

12 April — Boiano. Meeting with Father Sywak. Inspection of the primary school. Conference with Father Wojciechowski. Later with Fr Cieński and the local chaplain.

13 April — Boiano-Mottola. Departure to Mottola. Meeting with Gen. Przewłocki and Father Tyczkowski.

14 April — Mottola. Mass celebrated in prisoner-of-war camp with assistance of Father Tychowski and Father Bocheński. Bishop meets 368 POWs. Visit to Hospital. Meeting with Father Kucharski.

15 April — Mottola. Visit to Hospital. Meeting with the Sister in Charge and Father Wojtas. Result of Bishop's medical check up: order for a few days rest. Conference with the chaplains: Father Cieński, Father Tyczkowski, Father Mańturzyk, Father Kucharski, Father Mróz, Father Bocheński, Father Dr Cibor, Father Zelechowski, Father Wojtas, and Father Nadolski. Later, lunch with General Przewłocki and all chaplains.

16 April — Mottola. Departure for St. Basilio preceded by Mass. Later to Latina.

17 April — Bari. Departure for Ostuni, later to Fasano. Back to Bari — visit to Hospital.

18 April — Bari — Boiano. Departure for Baletta and Hospital No.93. Visit to S.Ferdinando and Foggia. In Bari meeting with Father Cieński and Father Joniec.

19 April — Ailano. Meeting with Father Judycki. Visit of army unit in Pratella and meeting with Father Dzudzewicz. Lunch with General Sulik.

20 April — Ailano — Venafro. Departure to Carpiati — Confirmation of soldiers. Meeting with Father Łuszczki. Conference with Father Cieński, Father Judycki,

Father Bocheński, Father Dubrawka, Father Dzudzewicz, Father Huczyński, Father Łuszczki, Father Szymański, Father Sławik. Two chaplains could not be present: Father Naumowicz and Father Chmielewski. Visit units in Gallo, Fontegreca, Prato. From his departure from Boiano, Bishop has covered over 1,430 miles.

21 April — Venafro. Meeting local Italian clergy. Conference with chaplains: Father Cynar, Father Judycki, and Father Sławik. Departure for S.Pietro Infine. Conference with General Anders.

22 April — Venafro — Carpinone. Departure for Castelpetroso. Inspection of the school. Visit of Polish units, whose chaplain was Father Walczak, in Machiagodana and Borgata Incoronata. Later, the unit in S.Pietro in Valle, where chaplain was Father Targosz.

23 April — Carpinione — Civitanova. Departure for Sessano. Solemn mass celebrated by bishop with two Italian priests and four Polish chaplains in attendance. Civitanova army unit visited with chaplains Father Maszkiewicz and Father Szawerna. Conference with the Father Cieński, Father Joniec, Father Bocheński, Father Szawerna, Father Maszkiewicz, Father Lisowski, Father Kiwiński, and Father Walczak. Later consultations with Father Cieński, Father Szawerna and Father Maszkiewicz.

24 April — Civitanova — Neapoli. On the way visiting Polish units whose chaplains were Father Bas and Father Wojciechowski.

25 April — Neapoli. Visit a local Cardinal and Bishops. Principe in Piemonte — visit hospital and meeting with Father Guzicki.

26 April — Neapoli — Bari. 200 mile journey

30 April — Cairo. Meeting with Father Chojecki and Father Kosłowski.

1 May — Cairo. Meeting with Father Chojecki, Father Reginek, and Father Wcisło, Inspection of Polish Cadets.

2 May — Cairo. Contacts with certain Polish diplomats. Meeting with Father Kostowski, Father Brandys, Father Reginek and Father Wcisło.

3 May — Cairo. Quassasin camp — meeting with Father Wcisło and Father Brandys. Tel El-Kabir meeting with Polish cadets where chaplain was Father Czapiewski. Cairo — consultation with Father Reginek. Visit to Halvan camp.

4 May — Cairo. Reorganization of chaplain's work and some personal transfers to Italy — to the front lines.

10 May — return to Italy — Venafro.

Bishop Gawlina's schedule of work shows an unusual number of appointments and visits, meetings and consultations, including, on every occasion, celebrations of the Mass, evensong, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, rosaries and novenas. The army doctor had ordered the Bishop to rest, but circumstances were such that any rest now was unthinkable. Units on the front line had to be prepared for a difficult campaign. They had to be well trained as fighting forces, but they also had to be strengthened spiritually.

Close contact with the chaplains and inspection of all units wherever they were serving helped the Bishop to improve the performance and confidence of the men. Action was close at hand and the chaplains had to be prepared for the most dangerous part of their duties: ministering to soldiers in the midst of battle; aiding the wounded and dying. It seems they were indeed well prepared. In the last weeks before the attack on the massif of Monte Cassino, the chaplains would spend their evenings with the soldiers, talking to them about religious and moral issues, relating them to the hardships endured by the soldiers. The liturgy helped to develop a spirit of prayer and unite the men with God.

Their diligence went further. Before the attack on Monte Cassino, Father Studziński searched for practical information as to how he should perform his duties in the middle of battle on this particular front line. He talked to Bishop Gawlina, who was resting in his tent, and to more experienced older priests.⁶⁵ Ordered to take up his position with his unit before the actual attack, he inspected in detail the area destined to be his place of work, so that he could criss-cross it in all directions while ministering to the wounded and dying.

Chaplains kept close to the tracks filled with marching soldiers, ready to serve as confessors, or act as messengers of confidential letters and addresses in case of death or mortal wounding. They carried field altars to less accessible places, enabling the soldiers to feel the presence of God in the celebration of Mass and community prayers. Units waiting for the order for battle would ask the chaplains to pray with them and give them general absolution, for some their last. Fr Studziński did his utmost to be wherever he might be needed. After a short invocation and reminder to the soldiers about the meaning of absolution, which, together with contrition for sins could unite man with God, he pronounced, in the name of Christ, the words of absolution.⁶⁶ The officer in charge of the unit had warned him that, if he did not arrive in time, the soldiers would bring him to the unit in a sack. This was no laughing matter.

Even as the soldiers went into battle, Bishop Gawlina would begin to say Mass — itself a memorial to the death of Jesus Christ. During the Consecration, the ground trembled over a wide area as Allied batteries pounded the German positions. This embattled union of physical and spiritual forces, seeking to enlist the help of God himself, forced its way ever forwards and upwards.

In the midst of battle, chaplains took care of the wounded, not only in their pastoral capacity, but also in the field hospitals and first-aid posts. The task of identifying the wounded and dead was also left to them. An exploding bomb killed Father Huczyński and the doctors working in the field hospital, as well as the wounded soldiers. Bishop Gawlina, in a tin hat and under enemy fire, inspected hospitals and more accessible areas in the front line.

⁶⁵ *Wspomnienia wojenne Kapelanów Wojskowych*, Warsaw, 1974, p. 400.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 407-08.

The final victory in the battle for the massif of Monte Cassino was a result of extraordinary sacrifices and considerable fighting skill, but it was also due to the invincible morale of the Polish soldiers. In building up and sustaining the morale of the army the chaplains had played a vital part. Monte Cassino serves as a splendid example of the chaplains devotion to God and man at a time of war and in the front line.

CHAPTER SIX

A Victorious Army Loses the War. Resettlement Camps (1945-47)

After the fall of France in 1940, the British Government invited the Polish Government in Exile and the remnants of the Polish army in France to the British Isles. The Polish army had by that time dwindled from 80,000 to 30,000 men. London now became the seat of the government. Scotland's army camps accommodated the officers and men who had survived the battles against the Germans in France. The army units had to be created anew and the soldiers had to adapt themselves to new weapons and equipment. The newly arrived Polish pilots were organized into separate units, although under British command, and assigned to Polish air-force detachments already established on British soil. The small Polish navy was untouched by the changes, as it had been fighting alongside the British navy from the beginning of the War. The existence of the Polish Government in Exile in London had a great impact on the life of all Poles in Britain. The government was the centre of Polish political life, a source of information, and formulation of proposals and plans for the whole community. Many highly-educated men and women, experts in many branches of science and cultural life, worked for the government. They felt themselves to be, and indeed were responsible for Poles, both in Poland and abroad. They kept in constant touch with the underground army in Poland, supplied it, sent emissaries there and met emissaries from Poland in London. Much of the military and political activity in Poland was directed by the government in London. The government also acted on information received: verified accounts of the Holocaust were immediately forwarded to the Allies by eyewitness Jan Karski with urgent pleas for international help.¹ Media communications, journalists working day and night, and printing presses were also supervised by government officials. However, a shortage of paper and strict control of information were responsible for severe limitations in the printing of newspapers.

The large number of young men, women, and even children coming to live in Britain faced the government with the need to establish a Polish

¹ Stefan Korboński, *The Jews and the Poles in World War II*, New York, 1989, pp. 53-54.

education system in Britain, both primary and secondary, and also to ensure educational provision for university students who would be much needed later in the war as highly specialized officers. The elderly and sick required immediate help and the benefit of social services. Those entrusted with ministerial powers, together with their aides, had the arduous task of responding efficiently to all these needs. The control and organization of the chaplains' work was centralized in the Polish Supreme Command, which was in the Rubens Hotel, Buckingham Palace Road, London. From there they were dispatched all over Britain by Bishop J. Gawlina, the Ordinary Bishop for Polish forces. Before the fall of France, pastoral work for the Polish air force and Navy in Britain was the responsibility of Father W. Staniszewski and his priests at the Polish Church in Devonia Rd, Islington.² The fall of France and the transfer to Britain of the Polish Government in Exile, and certain units of the Polish army from France together with their chaplains, initially caused confusion. The Staff Chaplain in the British forces did his best to allocate Polish priests to posts where they were urgently needed. Furthermore, General Ujejski, in charge of the air force, felt empowered to assign priests to his units, and so the important problem of legal and material support of priests was dealt with somewhat casually.

To put an end to this confusion, Bishop Gawlina presented to the British and Polish authorities his right of jurisdiction, putting him in charge of all Polish chaplains.³ Soon after, the Polish and British authorities approved his request for the granting of official status to thirteen Polish chaplains serving exclusively with the Polish air-force. In time, the number of chaplains serving the Polish airmen, who were spread over 130 airfields, grew to fifteen.⁴

The endeavours of Bishop Gawlina were appreciated by the British Staff Chaplain. In his letter to the Bishop he writes:

I would like to remind you, which perhaps you would like to mention in your talk, how much British officers have admired the alert bearing and smart saluting of both Poles and Czechs during their short visit to this country. A word of encouragement, the continuance of discipline and obedience will be of tremendous help to the Commanding Officer.

If you would like to say a word to them of the anxiety of their Commanding Officer and their Messing Officer to have them well treated, it would be a subject that would also have some bearing.. Words coming from you will bear an importance that the ordinary English officer cannot give them and will be remembered even when the ordinary directions of officers are forgotten.⁵

The Scottish camps also had their own chaplains supervised now by the Bishop.

² Bishop Gawlina's archives (hereafter BGA), Letter from the Air Ministry, 15 August 1940.

³ BGA, Letter to Staff Chaplain, 9 October 1940; Letter to Gen. Ujejski, 7 October 1940; his reply of 30 October 1940; Letter of the Staff Chaplain, 30 October 1940, acknowledging his jurisdiction.

⁴ BGA, Letter from Fr Miodoński, 30 April 1942.

⁵ BGA, Letter, 18 July 1940.

In the ports, the Polish navy had chaplains waiting to welcome warships calling for short repairs or a well-deserved rest. Some of the sick sailors were directed to hospitals in different parts of the country for more specialized care. They expected to be visited by their Navy chaplains. Schools of various kinds were set up: primary, secondary and special Cadets' Schools ('Junaki') for boys and girls. Some chaplains became members of the teaching staff. Universities with Polish students — Edinburgh in particular — had to be assigned chaplains. During the reorganization period, when the army was confined to barracks, some army chaplains were temporarily relieved of their normal duties and transferred to schools.⁶ Both army personnel and civilians, adults and children, lacked religious literature and essential liturgical books, hymnals and prayer books. Father Bełch, chaplain in a Scottish camp, was sent by Bishop Gawlina to London to take care of this very important work.⁷

For Catholic chaplains, Great Britain was a curious and difficult place to live and work in. The number of Catholics in the country was small, not even reaching ten per cent of the population. Their impact on society was negligible. The Catholic Church and the nation were completely separate, and the church did not share in the life of the nation. In Catholic churches, church bells were silent. Nobody saw a Corpus Christi procession celebrated in the main streets of towns and cities. Of course, in Polish army units and army camps, life was organized in the traditional, Polish way — but contact with the outside world brought many unexpected problems.

For instance, a Corpus Christi procession in a Scottish town had to be cancelled so as not to offend the non-Catholic members of the community.⁸

On another occasion, the Polish army choir took part in a non sacramental service in St Paul's Cathedral in London and was subsequently severely condemned by the highest Catholic authorities in London. A letter of admonition was sent to the Polish Bishop, with a demand that he keep such matters under control. It was felt that a Catholic choir should not sing during an Anglican service. This caused considerable unhappiness and embarrassment among the Poles — especially as the ceremony in St Paul's Cathedral included special prayers for Poland.⁹

In places where Polish chaplains had to use local Catholic churches, they frequently felt the hostility of the local clergy. In one parish, Poles were accused of breaking into the local Catholic school. They had, indeed, been in that building the previous day and had attended Mass there, but they had been given permission and nothing had been stolen. In the diocese of Dunkeld, Bishop Maguire asked Polish chaplains to be patient when dealing with the local clergy.¹⁰

⁶ *Wspomnienia wojenne Kapelanów Wojskowych*, Warsaw, 1974, pp. 437-41.

⁷ Polish Chaplains in Scotland. Minutes of meeting dated 15 November 1942.

⁸ BGA, Fr Zyłka's report, 3 June 1940.

⁹ Mgr Staniszewski's statement: it happened on 2 May 1943.

¹⁰ BGA, Fr Obertyński's letter, 1 March 1942.

British Catholics in charge of local Catholic organizations and even those in the British army, felt that, as Polish Catholics were now residents of Great Britain, they should, naturally, become members of British organizations and give them their full support.¹¹ The Staff Chaplain of the British army sent a letter to Bishop Gawlina requesting that he encourage the soldiers, in this case members of the Polish air force, to join the Catholic organization 'Sword of the Spirit'.¹²

This rigid and legalistic view of the Catholic Church, without regard to the needs, feelings and different traditions of the Poles, put many of them on the defensive. They realized that they should be loyal to and supportive of local Catholics, but not subject to their orders and not at the cost of forsaking their own traditions and values. The best line of defence was to retain their own separate identity. The Poles were a distinct nation with its own government and army, and as such, they expected respect.

The morality of newly-arrived Poles was not regarded too highly by some of their own chaplains, as they appeared to have totally disregarded their religious duties. This complaint was directed at officers in particular who, being in charge of the units, had set a bad example to their men. Drunkenness was widespread. While common thefts were vigorously condemned, such condemnation was not forthcoming for the 'theft of wives'.¹³ Of course, all these failings were linked: men involved in drunkenness were prone to sexual excesses, and these, in turn, did not leave them disposed to prayer, moral discipline or attending church and receiving the sacraments. Cases of venereal disease were often a result of lax moral behaviour. Father Lorenc reports that out of 600 men about 100 had venereal infections.¹⁴

The authority of the church was at a low ebb. Pope Pius XII, with his ambiguous attitude towards the German occupation of Poland, to concentration camps and numerous other atrocities, had few friends. In some units, radios broadcasting information vindicating the Pope were instantly switched off by the officers. Propagandist literature about the schismatic Polish national church established in the United States was easily available everywhere.¹⁵ The constant arguments and mutual accusations of pre-war Polish political parties, concerning the neglect and betrayal of the nation, were most distasteful and rendered co-operation with the government almost impossible.

Against this background of mistrust and conflict, other events were taking place in some camps. At a time when propaganda was being directed at Jews serving in the Polish army in Palestine pressing them to desert, the same was happening in Scottish camps where Jews were also serving. In the second half

11 Keith Sword, *Tożsamość etniczna i życie religijne wśród Polaków w Wielkiej Brytanii, 1945 -1950* (typescript), London, 1986, p. 28.

12 BGA, Letter from Staff Chaplain, 14 January 1941. Peter Gilbertson's speech, 29 June 1943, *Polski Zjazd Katolicki*.

13 BGA, Fr Obertyński's report, 20 January 1943.

14 BGA, Fr Lorenc's letter, 13 April 1942.

15 BGA, *ibid*.

of January and in February 1944, about 200 Jews deserted from the Polish army, complaining of discrimination against them.¹⁶ In the previous four years, only seventeen Jews had deserted from the army, and no Ukrainians or Byelorussians. Suddenly, after the Teheran Conference, desertion among minorities became a problem. The reaction of Polish commanders in Scotland was similar to that of Polish commanders in Palestine: restrained and understanding. They did not punish the deserters. Those from the Parachute Brigade, when caught, had their brigade badges removed and were transferred to the British army, according to their wishes.¹⁷ General Sosnkowski was thanked in the Jewish paper for this humane attitude.¹⁸

The British press, however, reacted differently. Polish opposition to the Teheran agreement, and possibly the success of the army in battles with the Germans, increased the press attacks to a new high in the spring of 1944. Some well-organized events encouraged the press in this. Thirty soldiers from Scottish camps demonstrated in London, accusing the Polish army of discrimination towards the minorities — Ukrainians, Jews, and Byelorussians, and asked for transfer to the British army. In abusive articles, the press attacked the Polish army as a place of persecution of Jews and other minorities.¹⁹ The language used both by the tabloids and by rather more respectable papers was the same, abusive and full of phrases reminiscent of Communist propaganda. This led some Poles to state that, in Britain, there existed two of the worst Communist papers: *The Daily Worker* and *The Times*.²⁰

The declarations and explanations of the Polish Government in Exile had virtually no effect. The press was, without any doubt, infiltrated by Communist fellow-travellers, but had also been instigated by the British Government to attack and denigrate the Poles, who were seen as an obstacle to good relations with the Soviets.²¹

The case of the thirty soldiers resulted not only in attacks in the press but also led to questions in Parliament. The Poles were compared to the Germans, the enemies of Great Britain. The voice of the Polish Government in Exile was not being heard. Gen. Kopański, transferred from an active army unit in the Middle East to Great Britain, where he became Chief-of-Staff of the Polish army, was most keen to leave the unhealthy atmosphere of Great Britain and the Polish community there as soon as possible.²²

16 Z. Nagórski, Snr, *Wojna w Londynie*, Paris, 1966, p. 235; S. Sosabowski, *Najkrótsza droga*, London, 1957, p. 89.

17 *Ibid.*

18 Witold Babiński, *Przyczynki historyczne do okresu 1939-1945*, London, 1967 (hereafter *Przyczynki ...*), p. 275.

19 Witold Babiński, 'Prasa angielska w spawach polskich na przełomie lat 1943-1944', *Zeszyty Historyczne*, Paris, 1971 (hereafter Babiński in *Zeszyty Historyczne*), pp. 3-33.

20 Babiński, *Przyczynki...*, p. 274.

21 Babiński in *Zeszyty Historyczne*, p. 8.

22 Stanisław Kopanski, *Wspomnienia Wjenne, 1939-1946*, London, 1961, pp. 338-39.

General Maczek's armoured brigade, however, did not suffer from the difficulties and problems of life in Polish communities, both within and outside the army units. The outstanding personality of the General, and his successful drive for the creation of an armoured unit in direct opposition to the plans and will of his superiors, immediately attracted a number of experienced and reliable soldiers ready to serve under his command and in accordance with strict army discipline. General Maczek was not only a good organizer and strategist but also a father-figure to his men, who, in turn, held him in great respect.²³

Another exceptional unit worth mentioning was the Polish Parachute Brigade, the first in the history of the Polish army, under the command of General Sosabowski. He was a demanding leader, yet, by means of constant training and strict discipline, he managed to transform unruly soldiers into excellent paratroopers, who fought with great bravery on the Western front in the last stages of the war.²⁴

As one can see, Polish life in Britain was not entirely depressing and devoid of aspects to commend it. In the the army camps, at air bases and in the Navy, there were men and women possessed of unusually strong moral qualities, who wished to lead their lives according to the precepts of their faith, and who were ready to make sacrifices. They offered support and help to their chaplain when he arrived at his post, prepared the chapel and helped him in his ministry. They were a fine example of the Christian way of life, thus also impressing their English colleagues.

High-ranking officers and generals came regularly to these chapels and received the Sacraments. The presence of their captains encouraged the men to attend, and gradually they took an interest in decorating the chapel, buying flowers, candles and incense.²⁵ In time, the work of the chaplains, together with the positive example of officers and friends transformed the moral and religious life of the army.

In 1942, at a retreat for officers, the question of religious life in the units was discussed. The general view was that drunkenness had decreased, sexual laxity had diminished, moral discipline was on the increase and religious practices such as attendance at Sunday Mass and receiving the sacraments were becoming ever more widespread. It was felt that the main reason for shortcomings in the moral life of the army, both among officers and men, had been due to lack of contact with chaplains as well as the failure by those in charge to set a good example.²⁶

The validity of this conviction was being put to the test. From regular reports sent by chaplains to their bishop, one may see that in the initial phase of their pastoral work in the units, a very small number of men would come

²³ Stanisław Maczek, *Od Podwody do czołga*, Edinburgh, 1961, see Gen. Kukiel's preface, pp. 10-11.

²⁴ S. Sosabowski, see Kazimierz Sosnkowski's *Słowo Wstępne*, London, 1957.

²⁵ BGA, Fr Lorenc, report, 13 March 1942.

²⁶ BGA, Fr J. Bocheński, report, 3 April 1942.

to Sunday Mass and receive the sacraments. Out of one hundred men, only a few would attend. Father Lorenc states that before he came to minister to the sailors on warships, out of 170 men only nine received the Sacraments at Easter, and when he first began his work, out of 250 men a mere thirty to forty were regular church-goers.²⁷ The English-speaking Catholic chaplains had no influence on the life of Polish sailors. Moreover, their frequent use of general absolution in place of individual confession and their inability to give practical advice about Christian life only made matters worse.²⁸ The Polish chaplains were obliged to rely on informal contacts with the sailors outside the chapel, and so try to have a positive influence on their moral life. Private, personal talks and discussions frequently solved problems which may not have been addressed in normal Sunday sermons.²⁹

After two years of work, Fr. Bocheński reports in March 1942:

decreasing drunkenness — very common in the past (reason: higher prices of alcohol and more positive moral attitudes); legalization of common law and Protestant marriages;
increase in regular church-goers (about 50%-60% for Sunday Mass and about 30% for confessions at Easter); return to regular religious practice by many previously indifferent officers;
the men, though, became in some ways less religious.³⁰

Progress in their pastoral endeavours resulted from the chaplains' close contact with their units, constant visits to the sick in hospitals and general solicitude as to their well-being.

Father Klementowski, a navy chaplain, reports about his visits to hospitals³¹ and his work with sick and disabled sailors:

— every month he distributed 109 books as gifts to the Polish sailors;
— twice a month he mailed Polish newspapers (*Polska Walcząca*, *Skrzydła*, *Wiadomości Polskie*, *W Imię Boże*, *Werynajs-humorystyczne*, *Cośtychać*) to the following hospitals: Liberton Hospital, Edinburgh; Mearnskirk near Glasgow; Glenlond near Kinross; King Seat near Aberdeen; Chidwall Hospital, Liverpool 16; Alder Hey Hospital, Liverpool 12; Gartloch/Glasgow; Larbert Military Hospital, Haymyers East Kilbridge; Plymouth R.N.H. Newton Abbot Devon; Middleton Hospital Ilkley; King George Liphook, Hants;
— once a month he delivered fruit, cigarettes and chocolates to the sick; as winter approached Poles in hospitals received warm sweaters, socks and gloves;
— hospitals within easy reach were visited by the chaplain several times a month — those further away would be visited once a month;
— sailors in the ports were under the care of Father Joško who in winter also distributed warm sweaters, socks and gloves.

²⁷ BGA, Fr Lorenc, report, 13 April 1942.

²⁸ BGA, Fr Klementowski, report, 6 May 1942.

²⁹ BGA, Fr Lorenc, report 13 April 1942.

³⁰ BGA, Fr Bocheński, report, 3 April 1942.

³¹ BGA, Fr Klementowski, letter, 6 May 1942.

Chaplains assigned to special units such as the Armoured Brigade or the Parachute Brigade, had to undergo the same training and discipline as the men, including, for instance, parachute jumps.³² They also accompanied the men and ministered to them throughout the battles, some of the chaplains being killed.

Throughout the war, Bishop Gawlina and his chaplains fulfilled their pastoral duties in many parts of the world, above all in the army, on the battlefields and in civilian camps. Yet, there also existed and thrived a small Polish church, dedicated to Our Lady of Częstochowa and St Casimir in Devonia Road, London, which was known as the Polish Catholic Mission.

Father Staniszewski, who was in charge of the church, was well known to all Poles in Great Britain, and also to the British authorities. Devonia Road housed all Polish priests visiting London. From there, they were assigned to serve, at least temporarily, the different needs of Polish communities, both in London and in the Polish air force. The British Staff Chaplain quite often asked Father Staniszewski for help in urgent cases where access to Bishop Gawlina was proving difficult.

The Polish church in Devonia Road became a unique church in a free part of Europe, from which Polish sermons were transmitted through the BBC to Poland. It was also a temporary 'Polish Cathedral' with its own Bishop J. Gawlina, and gathering, on special occasions, the Polish Government in Exile and representatives of all Polish communities in Britain.³³ Father Staniszewski altered part of the adjacent building to accommodate Polish soldiers coming to London for a short leave and in desperate need of a place to stay. 'Pani Ludwika' — the housekeeper of this Polish Parish, was well known to every soldier both for her excellent Polish cooking and her kind-hearted motherly concern for all.³⁴

The Polish Catholic Mission's monthly newsletter was known to all Poles, and printed information about the numerous issues not adequately covered by secular Polish papers, such as relations between the Vatican and Poland, news about the Catholic Church in occupied Poland and religious celebrations in Polish communities and army units. The monthly chronicle of events was collected and recorded there.

The voice of the Polish Catholic Mission, supported by the BBC and transmitted to occupied Poland, was apparently a threat to the German army of occupation. The streets around the church were bombed by the Germans and, on one occasion, their broadcasting service informed listeners about the destruction of the Polish church in London. Miraculously, the church remained intact and on the following Sunday, the BBC broadcast a sermon in Polish to Poland.³⁵

³² Franciszek Mientki, *Bóg i Ojczyzna*, Warsaw, 1987, p. 99.

³³ K. Sword, 'Katedra Polski Walczącej', *Nowy Swiat*, USA, 3 December 1953, p. 23.

³⁴ *Polska Misja Katolicka*, London, 1954, p. 58.

³⁵ Mgr Staniszewski, statement to the author.

The existence of various Polish groups in Britain, both civilian and those affiliated to the army, required a diversification of pastoral care. Fortunately, Bishop Gawlina with his chaplains, and Father Staniszewski, together with visiting priests, were able to provide pastoral care for the army in camps, hospitals, cadet schools, for airmen at air bases, for the navy in the ports and on warships and transporters. They also ministered to civilians in the Polish Government in Exile, in hospitals and schools, they edited newspapers, books, and performed their normal pastoral work in the Polish church in London and chapels throughout Britain. This often invisible work was an essential part of Polish life in Great Britain.

The Poles, engaged in intensive battle with the Germans, saw only one purpose to justify their exertions. Feeling that their political objectives had been lost, they had to fight to save their honour.³⁶ British observers and observers of other nationalities had known that the Poles would lose the freedom and national sovereignty they had been fighting for. This fact led to attempts to disperse the Polish army in small units to different non-Polish brigades and armies, where they would be under direct non-Polish command. This is what had happened in the Soviet Union, had been suggested for the Polish army in the Middle East, and had been proposed to General Anders shortly before the transfer of the army to Italy.³⁷ Polish commanders, though, had consistently rejected these suggestions. To fight effectively, Polish soldiers had to fight as one army, under Polish command.

The Polish commanders suspected other motives, such as the desire to diminish their value as soldiers and deprive them of the fruits of their sacrifices and victories. The strategic plans for the battle of Monte Cassino had been brilliantly conceived by the Allies, so it would be the Allies who would storm all the strategically important objectives and take them 'before the Poles could claim that Cassino was theirs'.³⁸ Thus, the Polish commanders saw it clearly as their duty to do their utmost to prevent Poland from being robbed of the credit and glory that was their due, and for which so many had paid with their lives.

The mighty efforts of the armies of many nations, Poles among them, finally brought about the end of the war. The Third Reich had been defeated by the Allies, and the joy of victory was immense, both in the Allied armies, and among the people of their countries. Poles were the exception. After their horrifying experiences in Russia they were confronted with the tragic reality that their country had been partitioned by Russia with the full-hearted approval of the Allies. Communists were in power in Poland, again with the approval of the Allies, and they, as the enemy of Communism, had no place in their own country. They feared that prisons and concentration camps were being prepared for them:

³⁶ E.D. Smith, *The Battle for Cassino*, New York, 1989 (hereafter *Battle for Cassino*), p. 175.

³⁷ Władysław Anders, *Bez ostatniego rozdziału*, Newtown, 1949, p. 201.

³⁸ Smith, *Battle for Cassino*, p. 173.

Machiavelli advised against an alliance with a stronger partner; in case of defeat the stronger partner would sign a peace treaty at the expense of the weaker partner, but in case of victory, the weak partner will find himself face to face with the victor and entirely at his mercy. Such was the fate of Poland in those days ...

The final surrender of Germany was signed on 7 May 1945. The Polish soldiers, who took part in the Narvik campaign, had been in action in Tobruk, at Monte Cassino, in Falaise and Arnhem, did not take part in the London Victory Parade.³⁹

The end of the war confronted exiled Poles with the question of whose resolution they had, up to this point, taken for granted. They had all been fighting for a free Poland and had dreamed of returning to their mother country. Now, a situation had been created which in no way corresponded to their dreams. After the Yalta agreement the homes of many Poles, and Poland itself, were under Soviet occupation. This stark reality was presented by Allied diplomats in a variety of euphemistic terms.

The call for a return to Poland, though, was most insistent. The Communist Government in Warsaw expected the whole Polish army abroad to return to Poland. The process of transition was being well prepared with generals and officers from Warsaw ready to take over all significant posts in the army and give the order for a return to Poland.⁴⁰ The British Government hoped that the Polish problem could be solved with the minimum of fuss by repatriating the embarrassing Allies to their mother country. Ernest Bevin felt unhappy with the decision of the Polish Government in Exile that the Polish army abroad would not return to Poland, but that anyone volunteering to return had to do so individually. He openly declared that Poles refusing to return could not be certain of their right of abode in Great Britain.⁴¹

Communist propaganda, working through the media and including influential newspapers in Britain and in Italy, did everything possible to spread an atmosphere of hatred towards the Poles.⁴² This led to conflict and misunderstandings. Some of the Poles, by organizing groups for repatriation,⁴³ were quite possibly, and unintentionally, serving Communist and British goals.

The propaganda urging Poles to return to Poland, however, had little success, and the number of men returning was extremely small. Out of 207,000 Polish soldiers, only 37,000 returned to Poland, that is 17.9%.⁴⁴ The Poles knew very well what they could expect from the Communists. Ernest Bevin then tried an alternative solution to the Polish problem by creating the Polish Resettlement Corps. Everybody volunteering for the Corps was accommodated in camps, on a small army salary, under British military discipline, but under Polish command. The families and relations of these

³⁹ Józef Czapski, *The Inhuman Land*, London, 1987, pp. 324, 354.

⁴⁰ M. Młotek, *Trzecia Dywizja Strzelców Karpaccich*, vol. I, London, 1978, pp. 780-81.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 782.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 784.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 133.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

soldiers were also accommodated in these camps. The Resettlement Corps was also responsible for facilitating the return to civilian life of each individual. The Corps was to exist for two years.⁴⁵

From the end of the war, the normal, disciplined life in the Polish army was showing signs of disintegration. Trust and confidence in the abilities of superiors had diminished. The future was uncertain and depressing — return to Poland may well have resulted in prison or even death. Remaining abroad, for example in Britain, without knowledge of the language, local law and social customs, would lead to Poles to be designated as a group of foreigners at the bottom of the British social structure. Resettlement camps gave skilled and semi-skilled workers a chance to adapt, but officers with higher education, such as solicitors, teachers, doctors, scientists, businessmen, journalists, musicians, writers, clerks and professional army officers, had no hope of gaining employment in their professions. There was also the problem of families, the children and youth, the disabled and invalids.⁴⁶ The future was indeed black.

The Poles accused the British of perfidy in politics (the perfidy of Albion), selling them out to the Russians, using them in times of trial and rejecting them when they felt secure. The final humiliation of not being included in the Victory Parade was for the Poles a true illustration of the British attitude towards them. Yet, with all their complaints and accusations, the Poles always behaved in a most civilised way. Despite being armed and having well-organized army units, they had never mounted serious armed protests, although they had had sufficient reasons for doing so, and they had never refused orders to fight even in what appeared to them futile battles. On the contrary, even though they felt bitterness in their hearts, they had done their utmost to be faithful to their military duties.

Quite possibly, even though they felt contempt for British politics, they may well have discerned sympathy and understanding of their difficulties and sufferings among their British comrades-in-arms⁴⁷ of all ranks, and so, against all odds, they believed in British fair play to the end. Although in the political arena the British did not treat the Poles fairly, they were most helpful in organizing Polish resettlement camps. The camps gave Poles the time and opportunity to reorganize their lives, starting from a well known pattern of military discipline, and changing slowly to adjust to the pace of civilian life. Officers in charge of the army became their guides and mentors in this transitional process. Many of them were deeply affected by the new situation, but, nevertheless, calmly accepted the change from socially exposed, responsible positions to the humble life of unknown civilians, quite often as manual workers. A Polish Ambassador to an important country now cleaned

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 159-60.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 168-69. See also Jan Ciechanowski, 'Emigracja Polska w Wielkiej Brytanii', *Duszpasterz Polski Zagranicą*, No.3, 1986, pp. 550-52.

⁴⁷ Józef Garliński, *Poland in the Second World War*, London, 1985, p. 327. See also Anders, *Bez ostatniego rozdziału*, Gen. Lee's Speech, pp. 429-32.

the silver in a hotel,⁴⁸ a Major in the air force, a Colonel and an old legionary,⁴⁹ mentioned in Polish history books, became woodcutters in Welsh forests, generals worked in factories and became shopkeepers,⁵⁰ teachers and scientists became railway workers and attendants at railway stations. This readiness to adapt to their new circumstances was evidence of their moral resilience and devotion to their ideals.

Ex-servicemen had the chance to retain their traditions and culture. The camps had their own Polish schools, chapels, chaplains, libraries, cinemas and theatres. A special Polish organization in London supplied Polish films, regularly changed books in the libraries and organized entertainment by sending theatrical groups and choirs.⁵¹ The children were taught English and were introduced to the English way of life. Adults with a knowledge of English learned new trades and professions which helped them when looking for employment. This proved to be a difficult hurdle. The powerful unions, heavily infiltrated by Communists, were often the main obstacle in the fight for a job. They presented Poles as 'fascist reactionaries', 'landlords', 'Jew-baiters', and used similar language normally reserved for the enemy. They also played on the fear of foreign labour felt by British workers.⁵² Poles could:

jeopardise the maintenance of full employment, bring down British workers' living standards or wages, destroy the hard earned liberties of trade unionists, accentuate the housing shortage and eat food that Britain could hardly spare ... Some arguments used in the anti-Polish campaign had a religious content. Poles, predominantly Roman Catholics, were said in some parts of Scotland, to be Papist spies. All over the country they were portrayed, with some success, as a race of Casanovas who menaced the integrity of British womanhood.

The combination of part-truths and prejudice was a powerful one.⁵³

The hardships of life in the Soviet Union and in the army were good preparation for the Poles in their present difficulties. The weak in mind or body, however, were unable to overcome these problems. Fatally scarred by the events of the war and current circumstances, some had to go to mental institutions or were cared for in their communities by friends and relatives. Polish criminals, according to Zubrzycki:

choose more violent and aggressive forms of delinquent behaviour than the host society. Instead of engaging in the 'milder' forms of theft, receiving, fraud and embezzlement, our Polish delinquent tends to robbery with violence or in extreme cases to murder.⁵⁴

48 Ambassador Poniński.

49 Col. Surówka and Mjr Olszewski.

50 Gen. Juliusz Kleeberg.

51 Jerzy Zubrzycki, *Polish Immigrants in Britain*, The Hague, 1956, pp. 112-12.

52 *Ibid.*, p. 81.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 82.

54 *Ibid.*, p. 185.

Dr K. Sword reports a case in Slough, where young guardsmen from Windsor, who had possibly insulted a Polish ex-servicemen in a pub, were found knifed, probably by the Poles.⁵⁵ The repercussions of these unfortunate events increased the feeling of hopelessness and despair of those men who had lost all their long cherished dreams.

New Challenges

The end of the war and its tragic outcome for Poland was a tremendous blow to the Poles in exile. They had been displaced from the ranks of the victors and, in their place, a puppet regime had been introduced by their friends and allies, a regime created, trained and managed by Stalin. This day of Victory, 9 May 1945, was indeed black. Still, life had to continue, and the Poles in exile had to make a considerable effort to face up to the challenge. The officers in charge of the army units planned useful activities for the soldiers who had not yet been disbanded.⁵⁶ The chaplains concentrated on their pastoral activities endeavouring through sermons and discussions to encourage their flock to assume a positive approach to their uncertain future. In the army, discipline was strictly observed. The men were kept occupied with duties such as guarding the army camps and the prisoner-of-war camps, and were otherwise engaged in activities designed to maintain their morale and preserve their military skills.

In Germany the Polish army took care of Poles freed from prisons and concentration camps who had refused to return to a Communist-run Poland. They helped them to create new organizations and a network of Polish schools with a very powerful association of teachers. The army also helped the families of soldiers in exile to escape illegally from Poland and join their husbands and fathers in the West.⁵⁷

The chaplains helped the soldiers to understand their problems in the light of their faith. They encouraged them to be strong and maintain their faith in the ultimate triumph of good over evil. Nevertheless, in reports to Bishop Gawlina, they admitted that their efforts were not always well received. Some of their parishioners complained about this sort of moral pressure which they felt unable to cope with at that time. This was a sign of a general loss of trust in their leaders. While the chaplains often bore the brunt of these feelings, this attitude was directed first and foremost at the politicians and those in charge of the army, whom they had so far totally trusted. They themselves and their lifestyle became the subject of criticism.

Alcoholism became a major problem in many places. Uncertain about the future, soldiers would befriend local girls and marry them, mostly in a civil ceremony in a registry office, without any preparation or even a common language between them. This problem affected their religious life and caused

⁵⁵ Dr. K. Sword, *Ethnic Identity and Association among Polish Emigres in a British Town*, unpublished typescript, University of Sussex, 1982, p. 56.

⁵⁶ Młotek Mieczysław, *Trzecia dywizja strzelców karpackich*, vol. I, London, 1978, p. 784.

⁵⁷ T.A. Wysocki, *Polska Dywizja Pancerna*, London, 1989, pp. 205-21.

many worries for the chaplains. In Italy alone, these shotgun weddings numbered over 2,600, so the chaplains planned to open a resettlement camp for these couples in order to teach them all the skills necessary to conduct a proper family life.⁵⁸

The bitterness of the Poles towards the Communists was best observed in Italy. Those Italian towns which had a considerable number of Communists were frequently decorated with Communist placards and slogans. Wherever Polish army units served, however, all streets and buildings were immediately cleared of those signs, which often caused tension between the Poles and a hard core of Italian party members. Polish patrols and cars were sometimes shot at.⁵⁹ Army chaplains had to smooth matters over in these localities by contacting the parish priest and parishioners, who always warmly welcomed Polish soldiers as they were church-goers and ready to support the parish. These contacts became especially cordial after a party organized by Polish officers and chaplains in a parish hall for the local Italian children, long deprived of sweets and chocolates.⁶⁰

The political uncertainties affecting everybody's life induced tensions and possibly gave rise to some conflicts. A bitter article in the Polish Catholic paper attacked the Polish Women's Auxiliary Corps for the loose and scandalous life of its members.⁶¹ Father Cieński, the Chaplain-in-Chief of the 2nd Corps, complained about the difficulties of working with the Women's Auxiliary Corps and their refusal to allocate time for religious lectures and discussions.⁶² He questioned the instructions given on the subject of marriage by the Inspector of the Corps, Mrs Wysłouch, and the moral principles she presented. Some priests had undergone investigations for alleged involvement in the business of accepting money from the soldiers for safekeeping, and were accused of manipulating these funds for their own profit.⁶³ Sermons against the misuse of alcohol led to organized protests and life became more tense and unpleasant.

The accusation about the immoral life in the Women's Corps had been refuted by their superiors and the army authorities.⁶⁴ There were some bad examples deserving punishment and correction, but the general morale of the units was excellent. The Chaplain-in-Chief's difficulties were apparently resolved satisfactorily and the investigations of the priests mentioned above ended peacefully — there are no records of further action. Nevertheless,

58 Keith Sword (ed.), with Norman Davies and Jan Ciechanowski, *The Formation of the Polish Community in Great Britain 1939-50*, London, 1989 (hereafter Sword [ed.], *Polish Community in GB*), p. 336.

59 Władysław Maciejczyk, *Trzecia dywizja strzelców karpackich*, vol. I, London, 1991, pp. 784, 794.

60 *Ibid.*, p. 168.

61 Janina Odrowąż, 'Z Polka czy z Włoszką', *W Imię Boże*, weekly, 12 June 1946.

62 BGA, Fr Cieński's letter, 16 October 1946.

63 BGA, Col. Witek's letter, 10 July 1945.

64 Letter Col. Nowina-Swicki, 25 June 1946, defending Auxiliary Women Corps.

public disquiet concerning these accusations points to worsening moral discipline in the army and among civilians.

Confusion and distress deepened as a result of the pressures put upon the men for their repatriation to Poland. The number of Poles departing for Poland was not great — just over seventeen per cent of the exiles, but quite often, they were the most valued members of the community. This resulted in disruption in the life of many Polish communities, as such gifted and talented people were difficult to replace.⁶⁵ The formation of Polish resettlement camps put the Polish army chaplains at the disposal of the War Office to be used as an ordinary work force. After some time, however, the War Office excluded them from normal employment procedures and offered them the status of chaplains in the camps, including suitable remuneration and upkeep. In a letter dated 9 August 1948, the War Office presents a memorandum which explains that:

The Ministry of Labour have now agreed that Chaplains are in a special position and should not be regarded as candidates for civilian employment through normal Ministry of Labour channels ... It is notified for information that the notion is being taken by the authorities concerned to secure resettlements of all Chaplains in a capacity that is fitting to their status.

The Polish Resettlement Camps were organized into Commands covering the whole of Great Britain.⁶⁶ They were as follows: Eastern Command (22,000 enrolled); Northern Command (16,000 enrolled); Western Command (42,000 enrolled); Southern Command (20,000 enrolled); Scottish Command (37,000 enrolled); total:137,000.

It was considered by the Staff Chaplain that pastoral care in the Commands should be entrusted to twelve Polish chaplains.⁶⁷ The large numbers of camps and hostels as well as the beneficial results of the priests' work, led to a constant demand for their services, so their number was increased to over one hundred.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Władysław Maciejczyk, *Trzecia Dywizja Strzelców Karpackich*, vol. II, London, 1991, p. 155.

⁶⁶ Sword (ed.), *Polish Community in GB*, p. 49.

⁶⁷ 12 Priests in Commands. Letter of Staff Chaplain, dated 6 October 1946.

⁶⁸ These are the names of priests working in the Commands and in the Bishop's office, taken from the names of priests listed in 1948 in Bishop Gawlina's archives:

The Curia and Bishop's Administration

1. Msgr Bronisław Michalski
2. Rev. Władysław Słomiński
3. Rev. Celestyn Sowiński
4. Rev. Michał Król
5. Rev. Artur Słomka

Bishop's Archives

6. Rev. Antoni Hodys
7. Rev. Tadeusz Kurczewski
8. Rev. Walerian Gajecki

London District

9. Rev. Jan Brandys (Dean)

Scottish Command

1. Rev. Ludwik Bombas
2. Rev. Wincenty Drobina
3. Rev. Jan Gruszka
4. Rev. Franciszek Lorenc
5. Rev. Bolesław Lewandowski
6. Rev. Bonifacy Sławik
7. Rev. Kazimierz Sołowiej
8. Rev. Rudolf Szczyrbowski
9. Rev. Alojzy Waleczek

10. Rev. Józef Bystry
11. Rev. Tadeusz Kirschke
12. Rev. Antoni Gajda
13. Rev. Józef Matuszek

East Command

1. Rev. Franciszek Tomczak
2. Rev. Marcin Bardel
3. Rev. Jan Burdyszcz
4. Rev. Stanisław Byliński
5. Rev. Antoni Chojecki
6. Rev. Stanisław Cynar
7. Rev. Edward Frąckowiak
8. Rev. Rafał Grzondziel
9. Rev. Aleksander Hołowacz
10. Rev. Leon Frankowski
11. Rev. Franciszek Herr
12. Rev. Stefan Kiwiński
13. Rev. Henryk Kornacki
14. Rev. Jan Lorenc
15. Rev. Marek Maszkiewicz
16. Rev. Józef Madeja
17. Rcv. Jan Sarneta
18. Rev. Sobieski
19. Rev. Karol Świętoń
20. Rev. Tadeusz Wojtas
21. Rev. Adam Wróbel
22. Rev. Marian Walczak

West Command

1. Mgr Włodzimierz Cieński
2. Rev. Jan Bas
3. Rcv. Jan Bogusz
4. Rev. Henryk Boryński
5. Rev. Mieczysław Bossowski
6. Rev. Bolesław Charzowski
7. Rev. Ernest Chowaniec
8. Rev. Leopold Dallinger
9. Rev. Nikodem Dubrawka
10. Rev. Józef Gołąb
11. Rev. Władysław Górski
12. Rev. Antoni Jankowski
13. Rev. Jan Jażdżewski
14. Rev. Leon Kaczkowski
15. Rev. Juliusz Kaczorowski
16. Rev. Marian Sosin
17. Rev. Marian Stańczyk
18. Rcv. Mieczysław Stasz
19. Rev. Narcyz Turulski
20. Rev. Feliks Kamiński
21. Rev. Franciszek Karkowski
22. Rev. Kasimierz Krzyzanowski
23. Rev. Antoni Kwiatkowski
24. Rev. Lcwicki
25. Rev. Marian Majewski
26. Rev. Antoni Mańturzyk
27. Rev. Mondyka
28. Rev. Aleksander Murat
29. Rev. Stanisław Nastalek
30. Rev. Piotr Niemira
31. Rev. Stanisław Paraszewski
32. Rev. Władysław Puchalski

North Command

1. Rev. Jan Cibor
2. Rev. Henryk Czorny
3. Rev. Alfred Bednorz
4. Rev. Józef Dryżałowski
5. Rev. Tadeusz Gaik
6. Rev. Kazimierz Krutkowski
7. Rev. Czesław Kulikowski
8. Rev. Józef Lepich
9. Rev. Michał Lewandowski
10. Rev. Martynelis
11. Rev. Kajetan Sufranowicz
12. Rev. Michał Szymankiewicz
13. Rcv. Franciszek Zelechowski

33. Rcv. Paweł Sargiewicz
34. Rev. Stanisław Śmieja
35. Rev. Teofil Wdzięczny
36. Rev. Marcin Wojciechowski
37. Rev. Stanisław Wójcik
38. Rev. Czesław Wysocki
39. Rev. Bolesław Zabłudowski

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Polish Catholic Mission in England and Wales: Scotland Follows the Lead

The tragic and unexpected outcome of the war caused havoc in the private lives of the Poles but it also had immense social repercussions. All existing Polish groups and institutions had to be disbanded, or if they were to continue their work they would have to be radically reorganized. Thus the structure of pastoral care for the Poles would also have to be reviewed.

Before the start of the Second World War the Polish Catholic Mission in London had been simply a rectoral church with duties limited to pastoral work among emigrant Poles, who were numerically insignificant. The war and the sudden influx into Britain, and London especially, of the Polish Government together with a large number of civilians and soldiers changed the situation entirely. The Poles needed a comprehensive and well-organized pastoral service. With a government of their own, an army organized according to Polish laws, and maintaining their independence in their community life, the Poles in Britain were not *émigrés* but a nation. They felt they had a right to their own ecclesiastical structure and the war helped to resolve this issue.

The bishop assigned to the Polish army, Józef Gawlina, had authority from the Vatican to organize and run church life for Poles serving in the army, their families and also those working for the army. One may say that during the war he was head of the Polish ecclesiastical structure for all Poles in exile, who indeed were all involved in one way or another in working for the army. The small Polish Catholic Mission in London was unable to meet the new demands, and its role was subservient to that of the army chaplaincy. Various army centres, community centres and schools were subject to Bishop Gawlina's authority in relation to pastoral matters, as were the priests themselves.

Bishop Gawlina's offices were situated in the Rubens Hotel as were those of the Polish Supreme Command: All his official letters were sent from there and his residence was also in the hotel. The end of the war, however, changed the Bishop's status and he had to evacuate his offices to new premises. In a letter to the Polish Ministry of Defence, the Bishop asks for accommodation for the following persons: 1) the Bishop, 2) the Bishop's chaplain and secretary, 3) the Vicar General, 4) the Priest in charge of the archives and of

the Greek-Catholic rite, 4) the church notary, 5) the liaison chaplain, 5) a lay person working in the office and a liturgical server.¹

Obtaining suitably large premises proved difficult and the Bishop's staff were allocated three rooms only in which to work.

The Bishop's application for accommodation shows the extent of his work. The end of the war did not diminish his workload but in fact increased it. More and more people needed to obtain death certificates of their relatives and also information about their places of burial. The completion of formalities relating to complicated marriage cases, and diverse other inquiries, as also decisions concerning personal and pastoral problems were time consuming.

The new communities in resettlement camps needed priests and regular pastoral care. Queries directed to the Bishop were endless. Nevertheless, the changed status of the army and the repatriation of part of it to Poland and other countries, together with its re-organization by the Resettlement Corps raised doubts concerning Bishop Gawlina's authority in the new situation. An official letter to Bishop Gawlina asked for clarification.² The Vicar-General of the Bishop, Mgr B. Michalski answered in detail in a letter to the Polish Supreme Command dated 31 January 1947,³ as follows:

- Bishop Gawlina is in charge of Catholic pastoral work in the Resettlement Corps: that is the Polish Army, Navy and Air Force.
- All priests employed in resettlement camps are nominated by the Bishop and they work under his instructions.
- The Bishop takes care of all persons having 'status militaris' and their families, including children under the age of 21.
- The appointment of teachers of religion in Polish schools is subject to the Bishop's approval.
- The Bishop is responsible for relations and correspondence with the British hierarchy.
- The Bishop is in charge of all Polish students of theology studying in British Catholic Theological Colleges.
- The Bishop co-operates with the General Command of the Resettlement Camps and all relevant local Commands.

Bishop Gawlina was still in charge of all Polish political exiles. His Vicar-General, Mgr Michalski, continued working from the Bishop's office, and former Polish authorities and Polish ex-servicemen considered Bishop Gawlina as being in spiritual charge of all Polish exiles. It seems, however, that the Bishop's power was slowly slipping away.

In January and February 1947 Bishop Gawlina held discussions with the British hierarchy on the subject of his jurisdiction.⁴ Later, in March, he visited the Vatican Congregations. Cardinal Tardini then issued a decree which authorized Mgr Michalski in London to be in charge of all Polish Catholics

¹ Bishop Gawlina's archives (hereafter BGA), Letter, 12 April 1945..

² BGA, Letter from Polish Supreme command, 23 January 1947, 1.dz.127/Org.46.

³ BGA, L.dz.349.

⁴ *Wspomnienia Ks. Bpa Gawliny*, unpublished memoirs, pp. 481-44.

living in resettlement camps.⁵ Those who left the camps would be subject to the jurisdiction of the local English bishop. The Vatican's decision was commended by Archbishop Godfrey, Apostolic Delegate to Britain.⁶ Bishop Gawlina did not return to London. Mgr Michalski published the Vatican decree, to be observed from 1 September 1947, in a letter sent to all Polish priests working in the camps.⁷ In the meantime, unknown to Bishop Gawlina and Mgr Michalski, a letter from Father Staniszewski, sent in July 1947,⁸ informed Cardinal Hlond in Warsaw about a number of important issues. First, he reminded him, that only the Primate of Poland has the title of Protector of Polish Emigrants approved by the Vatican. Bishop Gawlina who had assumed this title in wartime, had now 'demobilised himself'. Secondly, he warned about increasing pastoral difficulties and the necessity of reorganizing the whole system of pastoral work in the new civilian Polish communities. Father Staniszewski, it seems, offered himself, as an experienced Polish priest with good standing with the English bishops, to perform this task if the Cardinal were to approve his suggestions. Cardinal Hlond, no doubt somewhat disturbed by Bishop Gawlina's attempt to establish his own presence in London, consulted Cardinal Griffin, who was visiting him in Poland,⁹ on the subject.

With the closing of the resettlement camps Polish soldiers became civilians. The Poles lost their 'military status' and their right to autonomy as a community both in civil and church matters. In 1948, General Anders with his aides discussed with Mgr Michalski the future of Polish chaplains working at that time in resettlement camps. The value of their work required them to be permanent spiritual leaders in a newly formed Polish community in Great Britain. General Anders assured Mgr Michalski of his support for this position in the course of his contacts with the British Government.¹⁰

In the new political situation, all such issues had to be settled with the British Government. Poles with the right to the honourable title 'political emigrants', had to accept the authority of the law of their country of abode and the same principle applied to their pastoral structure. The legal changes to Polish status were visible in the letters from the British bishops concerning Polish priests and their work in Britain. The letters addressed in the past to Bishop Gawlina, gradually came to be redirected to Father Staniszewski, a priest not holding any office in the former Polish army and government.

In June 1948 Father W. Staniszewski was nominated Vicar-General for the Poles in England and Wales by the English and Welsh bishops. A few weeks later Father Bombas became Vicar-General for the Poles in Scotland. A special pastoral letter from Cardinal Hlond, dated 1 September 1948,

⁵ BGA, Decree No. 2767/47.

⁶ BGA, Letter to Mgr Michalski, 30 July 1947.

⁷ BGA, l.dz.969/47.

⁸ Polish Catholic Mission Archives, Letter 19.6.47.

⁹ K. Sword, 'Tożsamość etniczna i życie religijne wśród Polaków w Wielkiej Brytanii, 1945-1950', unpublished typescript, 1986, p. 24.

¹⁰ BGA, Minutes of meeting of Polish Chaplains, 26 January 1948.

introduced the new Rector of the Polish Mission in England and Wales to the Polish communities in Britain.¹¹ Cardinal Hlond encouraged the exiles to engage their energies in socially constructive work in their new circumstances and advised them to avoid political in fighting in their communities. The office of Vicar-General for the Poles in resettlement camps was, however, not revoked by anybody. In this situation, where not all the legal principles were as yet clearly defined, Father Staniszewski and Mgr Michalski decided that all official letters had to be signed by both of them. Sulik and Czaykowski, in a book written in 1960, report this fact, well-known at that time.¹²

Any of the former army chaplains, who wished to offer themselves for pastoral work amongst Poles in Great Britain, had to accept the jurisdiction of the Vicar-General for Poles in Britain, that is Father Staniszewski in England and Wales and Father Bombas in Scotland. It is probable that Bishop Gawlina and his deputy Vicar-General Mgr Michalski, expected that one or both of them would be called upon, to do further work with the Poles in Great Britain. This, however, did not happen.

Conclusion

The years 1945-47 were significant for over 100,000 Poles who remained in Great Britain. The radical changes in their lives led to new attitudes to many old institutions.

Political parties assumed the character of closed clubs. The government became a symbol, its *raison d'être* being to preserve the continuity of legally constituted statehood and institutions. The armed forces had ceased to exist, although ex-servicemen, some of them waiting impatiently for a Third World War in which they would play their part,¹³ continued to associate forming various organizations and clubs. All Poles had to work hard to make a living for themselves and their families in a new and unknown country.

It seemed that one institution, the Catholic Church, remained unchanged, acting as a stabilizing influence in a fast-changing world. But this was not so. Bishop Gawlina, well-known and liked by the old soldiers and their families, had to give up his office as army Bishop in charge of all those who had fought for the freedom of their country and of their families — those who were now permanent exiles.

Some of the events at this time in his life were inexplicable and shrouded in mystery. Gawlina's meetings and contacts with English bishops, which had helped to formulate new rules for Polish civilian communities, taking place while he was still apparently the man in charge and recognized as such by Archbishop Godfrey, the Apostolic Delegate,¹⁴ ended suddenly with his visit to Rome, from which he did not return to Britain. Instead Msgr Michalski, his trusted assistant and Vicar-General came to be in charge of Polish exiles but

¹¹ Full text in Polish Catholic Mission Archives.

¹² B. Czaykowski and B. Sulik, *Polacy w W. Brytanii*, Paris, 1961, p. 436.

¹³ Jan Ciechanowski, *Powstanie Warszawskie*, London, 1971, p. 547.

¹⁴ *Wspomnienia Ks. Bpa. Gawliny*, p. 481.

with limited and ever-decreasing jurisdiction. Bishop Gawlina later states in his memoirs:

On 13 March (1947) I reported the situation in Great Britain to Mgr Tardini. He refused to agree to my jurisdiction over the soldiers or civilians under army control in the camps in England, against the former approval of the Apostolic Delegate in Britain ... I should not return to Britain even for a short visit.¹⁵

Bishop Gawlina was a soldier accustomed to obeying orders — he did not return.

In the delicate situation which had thus arisen in Great Britain and which remains unexplained to this day, two wise and responsible priests, Mgr Michalski and Fr Staniszewski now worked together, discussing pastoral changes and signing all documents jointly. This exemplary co-operation allayed suspicions of personal infighting among the Polish ecclesiastical authorities that had gained currency in some quarters. In time, practically all responsibilities and decision making authority became vested in the Rector of the Polish Mission in England and Wales, Mgr Staniszewski, and in Scotland, Father Bombas.

The nature of the rapid developments bringing unexpected changes in the life of the Polish community in Great Britain become clearer in the light of Bishop Gawlina's words:

On 25 March, Mgr Montini informed me that the British government had asked the Vatican for help in the work of settling Polish exiles in Britain.¹⁶

The request was most unusual and very helpful to the Holy See. Britain, supporting a state Church, the Church of England, and rather hostile towards the Catholic Church, needed Rome's help — this could in the future improve the status of the Catholic Church in Britain. Vatican diplomats could not refuse to co-operate. The British resettlement plan was to transform fighting forces into civilians. The army structure had ceased to exist. Bishop Gawlina was an important part of the Polish army structure which is why he had to stay in Rome. The Vicar-General, now subject to the authority of English and Welsh bishops, had to be a civilian. Father W. Staniszewski, who had been residing in London since 1938, and well-known to them, was suitably qualified to fulfill this role.

It seems a pity that these considerations were not brought out into the open either at the time or since. To those who understood the influence of anti-Catholic circles in post-war Britain, it was obvious that these measures were a necessity for the British Government and also for the Vatican. To bring about changes in attitude towards the Catholic Church would require sustained effort over a long period of time. It was worth taking these steps in the hope that they would contribute to this process. Bishop Gawlina understood this.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 485.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

The foregoing analysis is not based on full documentary evidence (it may be a good subject for future research), but offers a very probable explanation of these events.

While these changes at the top of the administration of pastoral work in the Polish communities were being made, work at grassroots level was continuing as usual. The British authorities, who had been well-informed during the war about the benefits of the chaplains' work in the army, had no intention of putting a stop to their activities, but, on the contrary, discreetly supported their efforts. In Bishop Gawlina's Archives there is an unsigned copy of a memorandum on the subject of Polish Priests in Great Britain, addressed to the Under-Secretary Of State, Home Office, Aliens Department. It states:

There are about 230,000 Poles in Great Britain and about 210,000 are Catholics. They are dispersed all over England and Scotland, in towns, villages and hostels ... They endure hardships mainly through difficulty in learning English. In most cases they manage to obtain their daily needs. In any difficulty they approach others for help or the priest. The above is the background for the work of the Polish speaking priest in Great Britain. There are 77 places in England (40 in camps and 37 in towns) and six in Scotland where there is a Polish speaking priest. Priests living in towns use the local Catholic churches; those in camps or hostels have temporary chapels. Priests in charge in those places have under their care all Polish speaking districts. Their duties are mostly spiritual, like the Holy Mass, Confessions, sermons, Religious devotions, Baptisms, work in hospitals, the welfare of the sick, the welfare of Polish patients in Mental homes (about 2,000).

There is another aspect of their work, connected with education and religious instruction and Polish culture.

Besides, they are most trusted by the majority of Poles and it is no wonder that in all difficulties they come to the priest and ask his help in all kinds of matters. This, however, gives much additional work to the priest. Local authorities and the Police in their difficulties on many occasions approach the priest with similar demands for help. All this creates a great amount of work and considering the age and the state of health of the Polish priests, there is an urgent need for help from abroad in getting more priests for this work.

The request from the Ministry of Labour, to which Father Kołodziejczyk refers in his letter to Father Michalski,¹⁷ leads us to believe that the Ministry of Labour agreed with the views expressed in this memorandum.

While, at first, Canada and Australia would not admit Polish priests,¹⁸ Great Britain on the other hand never questioned the value of their work. The attitude of the the local Catholic clergy sometimes differed from that of the civilian authorities. Some Polish priests reported a lukewarm reception and grudging tolerance of their presence by local priests and in some cases outright rejection. This may be understood as arising from anxiety about possible divisions in their parishes. However, experience over the years has shown that two Catholic groups can co-exist peacefully in the same area without interfering in each other's business.

¹⁷ BGA, letter from R. Kołodziejczyk, 6 May 1947.

¹⁸ Interviews with the Polish priests in Australia and Canada by the author.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Start of a New Life and the Problem of Preserving the Old Values (1945-50)

The end of the war started a great movement of the nations. Armies which had been fighting in foreign countries began to return home. Refugees from battle areas all over the world started the long march back to their own often devastated towns and villages. The Poles also followed this pattern. In 1945 about seventeen per cent of the soldiers, that is over 30,000 including their families, decided to return to Poland. In time, the number of those returning to Poland, together with others emigrating to other parts of the world, such as the USA, Canada and Australia, rose to fifty per cent of the Polish forces and their dependents.¹ Over 100,000, however, wished to make Britain their new home.

The movement of people from different parts of the world to join the Polish community in Britain continued up to 1950. In the years 1947-49 about 14,000 former prisoners of concentration camps in Germany and Austria arrived in Britain. In 1947 about 7,000 people arrived from India, Africa and the Lebanon.²

Accommodation plans, initially catering for over 150,000 people, were well prepared. The resettlement camps were later replaced by hostels, which were closer to civilian life and where army discipline and formal structures no longer applied. The large number of hostels gives us a view of the scale of the problem. There were 459 Polish hostels in Britain.³ Within a few years this number dwindled as Poles moved with their families to towns and cities where work was to be found. The number of different nationalities living in wartime Britain had created a climate where contacts between Poles and the indigenous population were easier to establish.

Hopes of returning to a free Poland having been suddenly extinguished, many of the exiles were shaken and became demoralized. For some of those

¹ Keith Sword (ed.), with Norman Davies and Jan Ciechanowski, *The Formation of the Polish Community in Great Britain*, London, 1989 (hereafter Sword [ed.], *Polish Community in GB*), pp. 79-80.

² B. Czaykowski and B. Sulik, *Polacy w W. Brytanii*, Paris, 1961 (hereafter *Polacy*), pp. 107-08.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

with strongly anti-Communist views, return to their families in Poland was unthinkable. They were already on the lists of 'the enemies of the people'. The NKVD had set about its sinister task with relentless energy.⁴ They could try to bring their families to Britain illegally. Some succeeded in this, others failed.

Signs of a disintegration of moral values were evident in Italy, where the truth about the abandonment of Poland by its political allies had been publicized in the media. The situation did not improve with the transfer to Britain and to the resettlement camps. General instructions requiring whole units to be resettled to the same locations, under superiors well-known to them, were observed, but the constant influx of new people from many countries forced camp commanders to make many changes in personnel. The chaplains were concerned about alcoholism, illicit marriages and irregular cohabitation of unmarried couples. Religious life was disintegrating rapidly and there was a great need to bring stability to people's lives.⁵

Despite these distressing signs of a deterioration of moral values, the resettlement camps and hostels, offering as they did a measure of stability, had, little by little, a positive influence on their inhabitants. The Poles living in hostels were now quite different from the ex-servicemen who had been demobilized from the army a few years earlier. They were self-assured, they had saved some money and acquired some knowledge of English. After a period of rest and an adequate diet their health was much improved. The time spent in resettlement camps and hostels helped many to organize their family life.⁶ Many groups of refugees from Africa, India and the Lebanon included a large number of orphaned children and young girls of marriageable age. The resulting marriages were often major events in the camps. Life in the camps and hostels brought the Poles closer together through their shared community and parish life. Every camp had a chapel, affording the facility to celebrate the various religious festivals throughout the year according to Polish traditions. The priests had to be very careful, though, not to allow themselves to become involved in any of the many political factions, so as to remain open to everybody. There were instances of political divisions between the people and their priest, with the priest taking the side of one party resulting in a large part of the camp boycotting his work and inviting another priest to perform the religious rites for them.⁷

The concentration in one location of many highly motivated men and women intensified human activity and plans to construct a new and better life. The most important needs had to be satisfied first. The need for information was overwhelming. Within a very short period of time a large number of different journals, weekly and monthly magazines were launched. In 1953 fifty-two titles were on sale in Great Britain.⁸

4 Władysław Anders, *Bez ostatniego rozdziału*, Newtonw, 1949, p. 422.

5 Sword [ed.], *Polish Community in GB*, pp. 19-20.

6 Czaykowski and Sulik, *Polacy*, pp. 120-21.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 119.

8 Jerzy Zubrzycki, *Polish Immigrants in Britain*, The Hague, 1956 (hereafter *Polish Immigrants*), p. 134.

The soldiers in the resettlement camps came from all the professions and amongst them there were good journalists, writers, poets, actors, painters, primary and secondary school teachers and university lecturers. With such highly qualified staff it was easy to organize schools in resettlement camps to fulfil the needs of those men who had been deprived, for many years, of the opportunity to acquire an education. Primary schools sprang up almost instantly in the camps. Four secondary schools were established in Britain.⁹ Plans to open further secondary schools for boys and girls were widely discussed. At Edinburgh University there existed a Polish Medical Department, which up to 1949 awarded medical diplomas to 227 Polish students and MD degrees to a further nineteen. The Polish Veterinary Department awarded diplomas to over sixty Polish students and the Polish University College in London educated a large group of teachers between 1943 and 1946.¹⁰ Glasgow was proud of its Polish Agricultural College.¹¹

Another need was to be met by the libraries. The libraries used by the army had been re-organized and sets of books were delivered to the resettlement camps while the Central Library in London changed them regularly.¹² Polish theatrical groups, cabarets and choirs were regular visitors to the camps. Cinemas periodically offered Polish films.

There was a strong desire amongst the Poles to form and join various organizations, allowing for the expression of all possible views. In Edinburgh, with a Polish population of 2000, there were about thirty organisations¹³ and five Polish homes. These, of course, were small local organizations. Zubrzycki, though, lists forty-two Polish organizations known throughout Britain. These included social, occupational, religious, scientific, cultural, educational and relief organizations. This great number and variety of associations catered for the diverse needs of the Polish community.¹⁴ The desire for family life led many young men to marry Scottish girls. In a population of 60,000 Poles in Scotland immediately after the war, there were 2,334 mixed marriages.¹⁵ Zubrzycki mentioned about 4,000 mixed marriages which had been contracted during the war in England.¹⁶

A large number of Poles coming from small villages and from families that had for generations engaged in agricultural work, turned again to the land which after the war was crying out for farmers. The level of interest in a return to the land was evident from the formation of the Polish Farmers

⁹ Kamil Barański, *W Trzy Strony Świata*, Hove, 1991, p. 79.

¹⁰ Czaykowski and Sulik, *Polacy*, p. 19.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 123-24.

¹² Józef Jasnowski, 'Zainteresowania kulturalne emigracji polskiej na terenie Wielkiej Brytanii na podstawie doświadczeń Centrali Bibliotek Ruchomych', *Polskie Towarzystwo Naukowe na Obczyźnie*, London, 1986, pp. 135-47.

¹³ Czaykowski and Sulik, *Polacy*, pp. 19, 27.

¹⁴ Zubrzycki, *Polish Immigrants*, pp. 108-09.

¹⁵ Czaykowski and Sulik, *Polacy*, p. 88.

¹⁶ Zubrzycki, *Polish Immigrants*, p. 158.

Union in Edinburgh as early as 8 November 1945.¹⁷ During the first years of its existence, it was heavily engaged in giving advice to thousands of Poles seeking to establish themselves on farms. Father Cieński refers to a thousand Polish farmers in Wales¹⁸ and Zubrzycki mentions eight thousand Poles working in agriculture and forestry in 1949.¹⁹ Some Poles started small businesses and in 1954 there were about 1,000 with numbers still rising.²⁰

The main objective of the concerns, plans, hard work and the accumulation of savings of the Poles was the acquisition of a house, a family home. They dreamed of a home of their own both during and after the war. This desire was the most important driving force in their lives. Similarly, Polish priests dreamed of their own churches, presbyteries and parishes. After the war, when they were sent to the various communities, they planned to realize their dreams.

However, the local clergy did not see any need for separate Polish churches. Scottish priests expected the Poles to be assimilated into the local way of life in a very short time.²¹ In some cases this idea was put to the Polish priest somewhat brusquely and without any regard for his feelings. Polish communities busy satisfying the most basic requirements of life had no time or money to offer for church buildings. Their priests had to accept this situation and worked in cramped conditions.

The priests, of course, showed a great variety of virtues and faults. How did they use their experience, gained mostly in the army or in prisons and camps during the war? The rigours of their experience had hardened them against psychological and physical difficulties and so enabled them to adapt to their new situation. Naturally they had a variety of different approaches to pastoral philosophy and to pastoral problems. It may be useful to survey briefly the personalities and activities of some of these priests, whose work often led to the establishment of a firm pattern in the life of their communities.

Rev. Drobina organized the Polish parish in Falkirk in 1948. In the beginning, out of 1,500 Poles in the locality, only twelve came to church on Sunday. After some time this number rose to between sixty and seventy. His pastoral philosophy was, that Polish life could flourish only where there was a fully functioning Polish parish.²²

The chaplain of Hiltingbury, siding with one political party, split the community in two.²³

In Manchester a somewhat delicate situation arose as a result of rivalry

¹⁷ Plon, *Pamiętnik Książka Rolników Polskich w Wielkiej Brytanii, 1945-70*, London, 1972, p. 4.

¹⁸ Polish Catholic Mission Archives, Letter to Rector of Polish Catholic Mission, 8 November 1948.

¹⁹ Zubrzycki, *Polish Immigrants*, p. 66.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Czaykowski and Sulik, *Polacy*, p. 42.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 46.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

between the Ex-Combatants Association and the Parish. However, level-headed leadership on both sides prevented these tensions from leading to fragmentation of the community. With the growth of the parish, demands for their own church became more insistent. Father Bas who arrived in 1947 became the *spiritus movens* of this drive. Initially, the prospects for success were not good. In 1949, the local English bishop of Salford rejected the project. Later he changed his mind and even encouraged the Poles to realize their plan. The Ex-Combatant Association joined in the project while the church in turn supported the Association. The co-operation between Mr Zaba, President of the Association, and Father Bas was exemplary.²⁴

In Birmingham the parish was from the outset the leading force in the community. Fortunately, it secured the right to use the diocesan Church of St Michael. Plans for the development and building of a large Polish Catholic Centre followed soon after. A group of hard working and dedicated parishioners together with their energetic parish priest, Father Kącki, formed an effective partnership. With the parish as a focal point, there were formed: a choir, a dance group, an orchestra, a theatre and a Polish Catholic Youth Association (KSMP) — everything the community needed. The parish priest, a man of strong personal convictions, understood the need for political tolerance in his parish. A parish can belong to no one political party but only to Christ and the infighting of political parties had no place there.²⁵

Father Walczak in Liverpool was an extraordinary man. An excellent secondary-school teacher in the past, highly educated and possessed of a warm personality, he was well liked by his parishioners.²⁶

Father Boryński in Bradford showed a vigorous devotion to duty. Not only was he always ready to preach and give talks to his flock, but he was also ready to join a game of football with the young people of the parish. He vanished suddenly and mysteriously. It is believed that he was murdered and his body dumped in an old coal mine. For some of his friends he died the death of a martyr.²⁷

Father Chowaniec, always ready to voice his opposition from the pulpit to ideas of which he disapproved, had at the same time the moral courage to bury the hatchet and shake hands with his adversaries and work together with them in a common cause.²⁸

Father Polak in Rochdale, often tired and probably ill, was most effective in his work with children. However, he no longer had the psychological resilience to cope patiently with the conflicts between different political groups in the parish.²⁹

Father Murat was a quiet and patient man, trusted by his parishioners and

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 182-27.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 192-99.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 209-10.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

interested only in the religious life of the parish. He had no enemies and no conflicts with political parties, but on the contrary, was surrounded by people seeking his advice.³⁰

Father Cynar's talents for financial management benefited not only his own parish, but also the Polish Catholic Mission as a whole. He was one of the organizers of the Polish Benevolent Fund, in which the ownership of the property of Polish parishes in England and Wales is vested. This was a charitable organization with the financial privileges due to all British charities.³¹

Father Staniszewski, who, following the guidance of Cardinal Hlond, sought to organize the pastoral work of the Mission in a way that placed it above all the political divisions infecting Polish communities, could not expect to have many friends in *émigré* political circles. Nevertheless, the influence of the Polish Catholic Mission on Polish life was undeniable.³²

Father Cieński, the former Chaplain-in-Chief of the Second Corps, was severely criticized and virtually accused of being an enemy by a former senior officer, now ex-serviceman, for not complying with that officer's request for a collection in the church for the benefit of an organization of which he was the founder. Father Cieński's response was that collections in church are reserved for the needs of the church and that he, as a priest, was not subject to his orders.³³

As one can see, there were priests and laymen who demonstrated their conviction that the parish is a unique place for those who want to live according to Polish cultural values. Those who deserted the church tended to lose these values. That is why the parish needed to be well organized and the priest well supported to enable him to visit and help parishioners in need. A presbytery and some means of transport are necessities for a priest. Priests with a well-developed understanding of practical matters and the ability to manage parish finances successfully have few adversaries. Father Cynar, in Clapham, was one of these.

There were also priests and laymen who openly warned against excessive concentration on material things. Material necessities are, of course, important, but the spiritual values of human life and work to uphold and develop these values must have priority in a parish.

Civilian life had to be organized in a different way to life in the army. The priests had to put some of the former senior army officers in their place, to make them understand that as civilian priests rather than army chaplains they were no longer their subordinates. The office of Rector of the Polish Mission and the role of parish priests demanded of them qualities of prudence and diplomacy to enable them to interact with different organizations, conducting their pastoral work freely and harmoniously with all. The personalities of

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 221-22.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 265-66.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 436-37.

³³ Polish Catholic Mission Archives, Letter, 24 June 1948.

Father Staniszewski, Mgr Michalski and Father Cieński and the other priests, respected as they were for their past work, fitted them admirably for their positions in the Polish communities.

An appreciation of the value of co-operation resulted in the development of parishes and other organizations in the communities. The communities, founded on the principles of just and fair relationships between the various organizations within them, supported as they were by the willingness of so many of their members to serve and make sacrifices for the community, provided for all the needs of their people.

In 1950 there were ninety-three priests in England and Wales and ten in Scotland, both former chaplains and those who had not served with the army.³⁴ All were employed by the Polish Catholic Mission in London and

34 *The Catholic Directory*, London, 1950, pp. 413-14.

These are their names as listed (i.e. some Polish spellings have been Anglicized) in the Directory:

England and Wales

Archdiocese of Westminster

Mgr Ladislaus Staniszewski (Vicar Delegate), Revv. Joseph Matuszek, Celestyn Sowinski, Victor Judycki, Tadeusz Kirschke, Henryk Kornacki, Joseph Warszawski, Joseph Bystry

Archdiocese of Birmingham

Revv. Franciszek Kacki, Pawel Sargiewicz, Stanislaw Nastalek, Mieczyslaw Bossowski, Feliks Kaminski, Narcyz Turulski, Stanislaw Paraszewski, Boleslaw Dzudzewicz, Alfred Botor, Piotr Szeffler, Piotr Roginski

Diocese of Brentwood

Rev. Aleksander Holowacz.

Archdiocese of Cardiff

Rev. Aleksander Murat, Ernest Chowanec, Nikodem Dubrowka.

Diocese of Clifton

Rev. Lucjan Luszczycki, Jozef Czerniecki, Zygmunt Jagielnicki, Leonard Czapski, Klemens Borowicz, Jan Przybysz, Jozef Golab, Bernard Kopec, Stanislaw Potoczny.

Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle

Rev. Franciszek Zelechowski

Diocese of Lancaster

Rev. Antoni Jankowski

Diocese of Leeds

Revv. Henryk Czorny, Tadeusz Gaik, Jan Dryzalowski, Michal Szymankiewicz, Stanislaw Smieja

Archdiocese of Liverpool

Revv. Jan Sameta, Jan Burdyszek, Antoni Pietraszek, Marian Sosin

Diocese of Menevia

Revv. Franciszek Karkowski, Boleslaw Charzewski.

Diocese of Middlesbrough

Rev. Dr. Marcin Wojciechowski, Boleslaw Zabłudowski

Diocese of Northampton

Revv. Stanislaw Nowak, Karol Swieton, Josef Madeja, Kasimierz Krzyzanowski, Feliks Brzuska, Henryk Borynski, Marian Bardel, Jan Stelmach, Marian Walczak, Ignacy Olszewski, Kajetan Sufranowicz, Jozef Kwiatek, Leopold Dallinger, Wojciech Szklanny, Marian Majewski, Ludwik Zmikowski, Franciszek Herr

Diocese of Nottingham

Revv. Josef Zawidzki, Edward Frackowiak, Jozef Lepich, Herbert Gatnarczyk, M. Kotowski, Jan Starostka, Stefan Kiwinski, Alfons Rataj, Michal Lewandowski, Julian Kaczorowski

Diocese of Plymouth

Revv. Andrzej Glazewski, Aleksy Finc, Jan Jazdzewski

Diocese of Portsmouth

Rev. Tadeusz Urbanski

Diocese of Salford

Mgr Wlodzimierz Cienski, Revv. Jan Bas, Marian Stanczyk, Stanislaw Wojcik

worked under the authority of the Rector of the Mission. As a group with one superior, united in a clearly understood common purpose, they formed an influential unit, which needed to be visible and respected by all Polish organizations. And indeed they were.

Conclusion

The years 1945-50 are extremely interesting for a historian researching the life of Polish communities in Great Britain. Over a relatively short period of time over one hundred thousand people, born outside Britain, differing in culture, language and religion from the host nation, harbouring a great desire to return to Poland after years of strenuous endeavour, were abruptly brought to a halt just short of their intended destination. A gigantic U-turn had to be made in the collective mind of the community. They had shown remarkable stamina equal to the extremely difficult trials that they had been faced with in the past, but the eventual outcome of this latest and most distressing experience could not be predicted. This was probably the reason why the British Government did its best to cushion the Poles from the dangers attending the political, cultural and psychological shocks they had suffered.

The creation of the Resettlement Corps with its large number of camps and hostels run by officers in charge of former army units, was an excellent step towards easing the process of adaptation.³⁵

The provision of instruction in English and an introduction to the British way of life, without at the same time placing any obstacles in the way of the Poles' endeavours to satisfy their need to maintain their own distinct culture through books, songs, dance or other artistic activities, resulted in the Poles not being deprived of anything while it opened to them the means of enriching their cultural experience. In New Zealand, on the other hand, there was an attempt to impose a new language and culture and to obliterate the old.³⁶ This caused many conflicts and much bitterness. British tactics were different. Freedom of expression and association allowed the communities to release

Diocese of Shrewsbury

Rev. Piotr Niemira, Czesław Wysocki, Jan Bogusz, Władysław Puchalski, Antoni Manturzyk, Mieczysław Stasz.

Diocese Southwark

Rev. Stanisław Cynar, Andrzej Busiuk, Tadeusz Wojtas

Scotland

Archdiocese of St Andrew and Edinburgh

V. Rev. Canon L. Bombas (Rector), Rev. Casimir Solowiej, Mag. Th. Rudolph Szczyrbowski, Wincenty Drobina

Diocese Dunkeld

Rev. Bolesław Lewandowski

Archdiocese of Glasgow

V. Rev. Canon Franciszek Lorenc, Rev. Jan Gruszka, Stanisław Posłuszny, Marian Skwerens

³⁵ Władysław Maciejczyk, *Trzecia Dywizja Strzelców Karpackich*, vol. II, London, 1991, p. 159.

³⁶ Theresa Sawicka-Brockie, 'Forsaken Journeys, The Polish Experience and Identity of the "Pahiatua Children" in New Zealand', Auckland, 1987, unpublished PhD thesis, pp. 340-41.

their creative energies and pursue their own projects. The positive attitude of the authorities towards religion, in this case the Roman-Catholicism of the Poles, was another sign of the British Government's will to ensure that the Poles should adapt successfully. 'The degree of independence given to Polish ecclesiastics in Britain is far greater than that enjoyed by priests appointed as pastors to minority groups in other countries.'³⁷ This was probably the result of understanding that 'the Polish Catholic ecclesiastical organisation in Great Britain ... is a factor which operates in the same way as Polish secular organizations and the press; it assists the Poles to maintain a high degree of social cohesion'.³⁸

The Polish priests appreciated the helpful attitude of the authorities, which was not always emulated by the local Catholic clergy. Interesting facts are emerging relating to the British Government's contacts with the Vatican which shed new light on the government's motivation. Was the Polish problem an opportunity to promote co-operation with the Holy See? The problem of assimilation, so important for many politicians in the fifties, has been the subject of study in Polish communities in Britain, by historians and sociologists (Zubrzycki, Patterson, Sword, Zebrowska). The fostering of Polish culture, language, books, art and religious life in Polish parishes was an obstacle to assimilation and certainly delayed this process. The communities, however, provided a spiritually healthy social framework which was salutary for people who were morally at risk. Zubrzycki refers to criminal cases involving Poles, where the individual concerned was rehabilitated by participating in the life of the community:

My informants seem to agree that the rehabilitation of the Polish criminal is only successful when the criminal is sent, upon his release, to an organized Polish settlement. Several examples were given to me of offenders who had made a perfect 'come-back' because they were made to share the life of a balanced Polish community.³⁹

The pattern of life established by Polish communities in Great Britain was probably a good social milieu for thousands of Poles. While it retarded assimilation it facilitated the slow process of accommodation, resulting in mature, healthy and happy individuals who were also loyal to the host society.

Zubrzycki writing in the fifties stated:

Political bitterness among the Poles is fading and admiration for the British way of life and social discipline is growing steadily. There is increasing realisation that the British authorities have made a genuine attempt to give Poles fair treatment. Gradual improvement in the economic situation of the individual Poles gives them a feeling of security and thus increases their predisposition to change and adapt their way of life to the British cultural standards.⁴⁰

³⁷ Zubrzycki, *Polish Immigrants*, p. 123.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

Sheila Patterson in 1961 stated:

Perhaps the best illustration of the present relationship between the British and Poles is that even in cities with a large Polish community such as Coventry, many local officials are barely aware of its existence. In Croydon, too, I was told: 'After all, they're one of us now. They don't have any problems or make any trouble.'⁴¹

This volume has endeavoured to bring out and analyse the distinctive role of the Polish Roman-Catholic Church in this historical process and in the life of Polish exiles in the dark years of the Second World War.

⁴¹ Sheila Patterson, 'The Polish Exiled Community in Great Britain', *The Polish Review*, USA, no. 3/61, p. 96. ??

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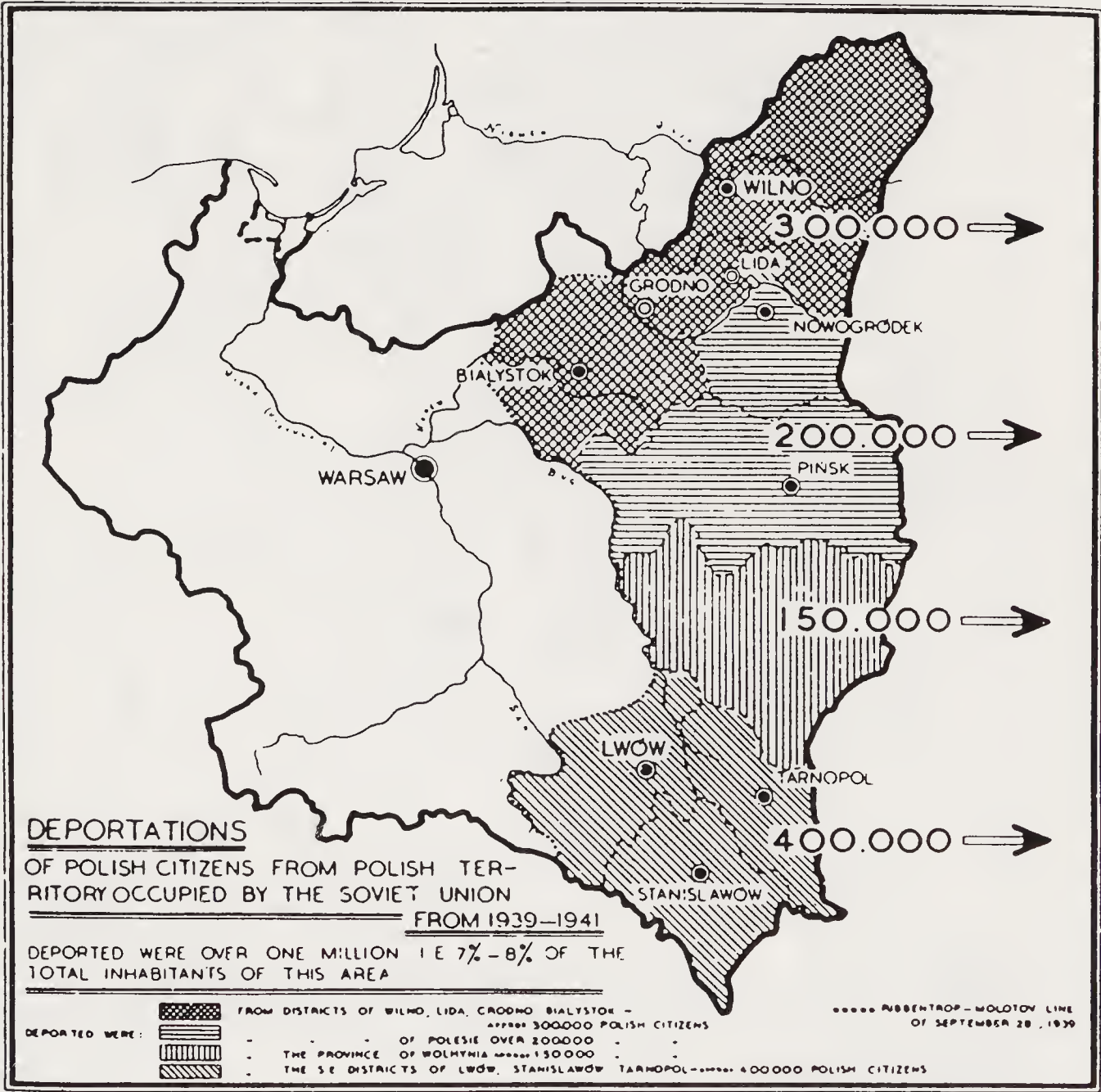
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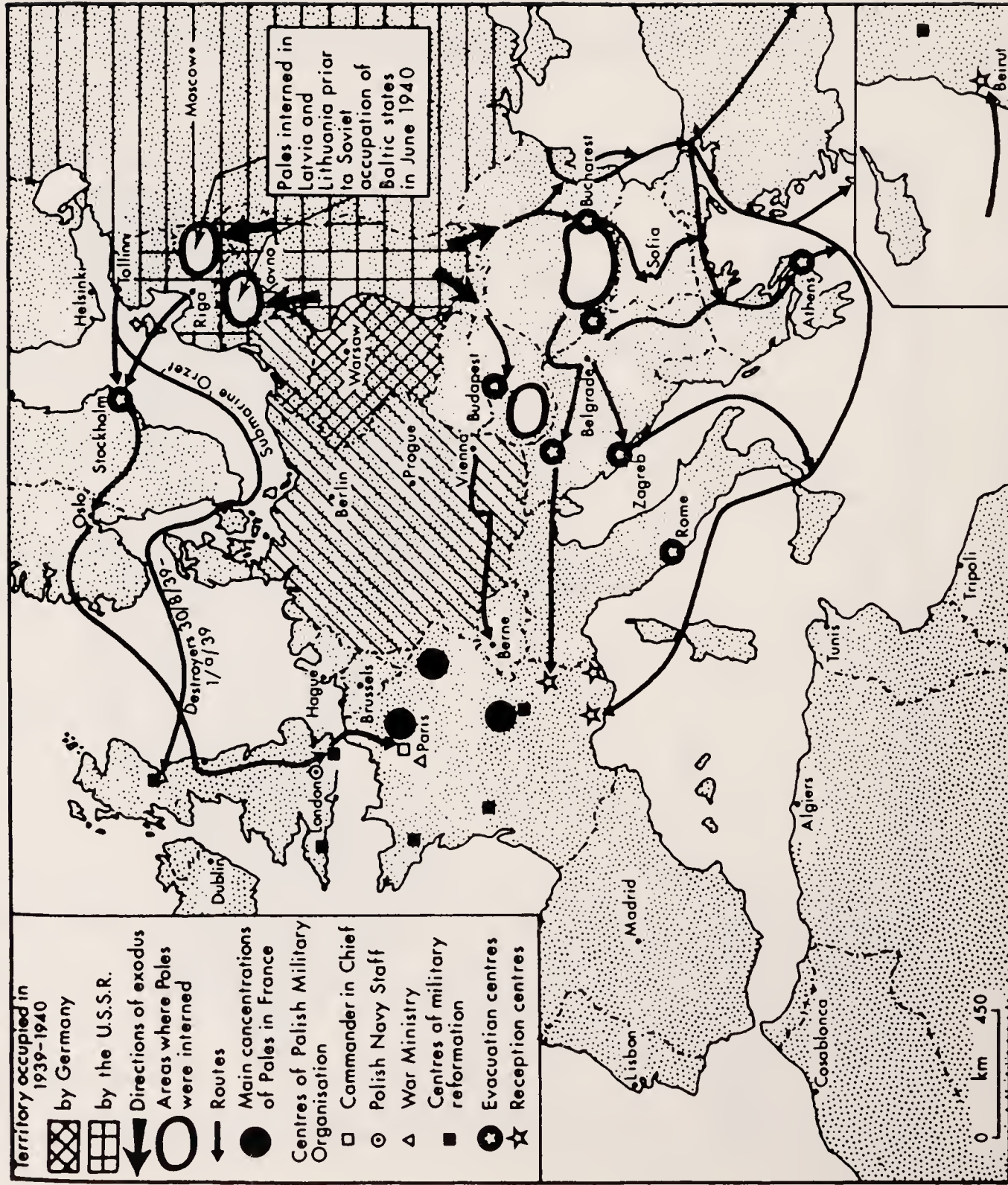
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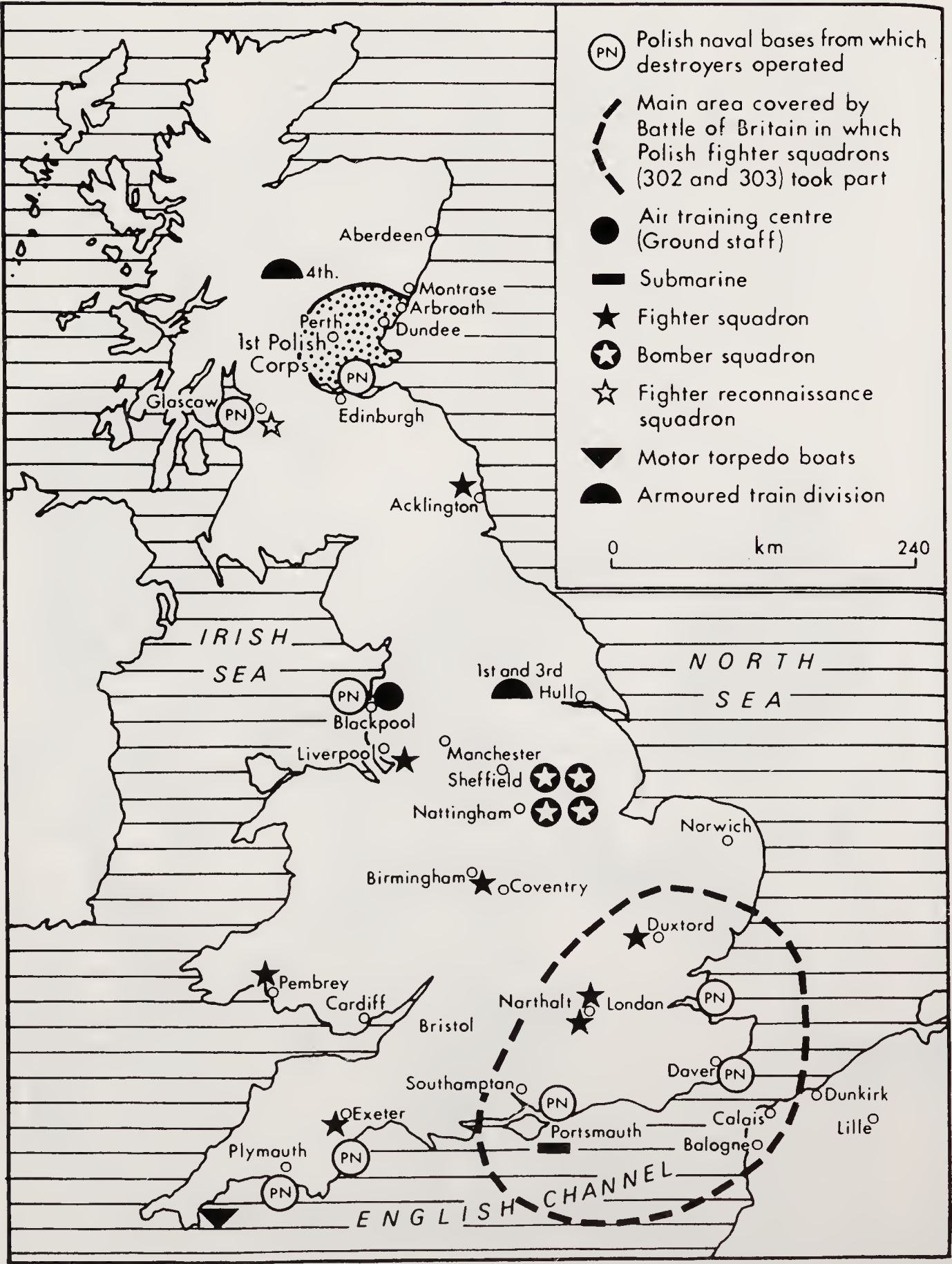
1. DEPORTATIONS OF POLISH CITIZENS.



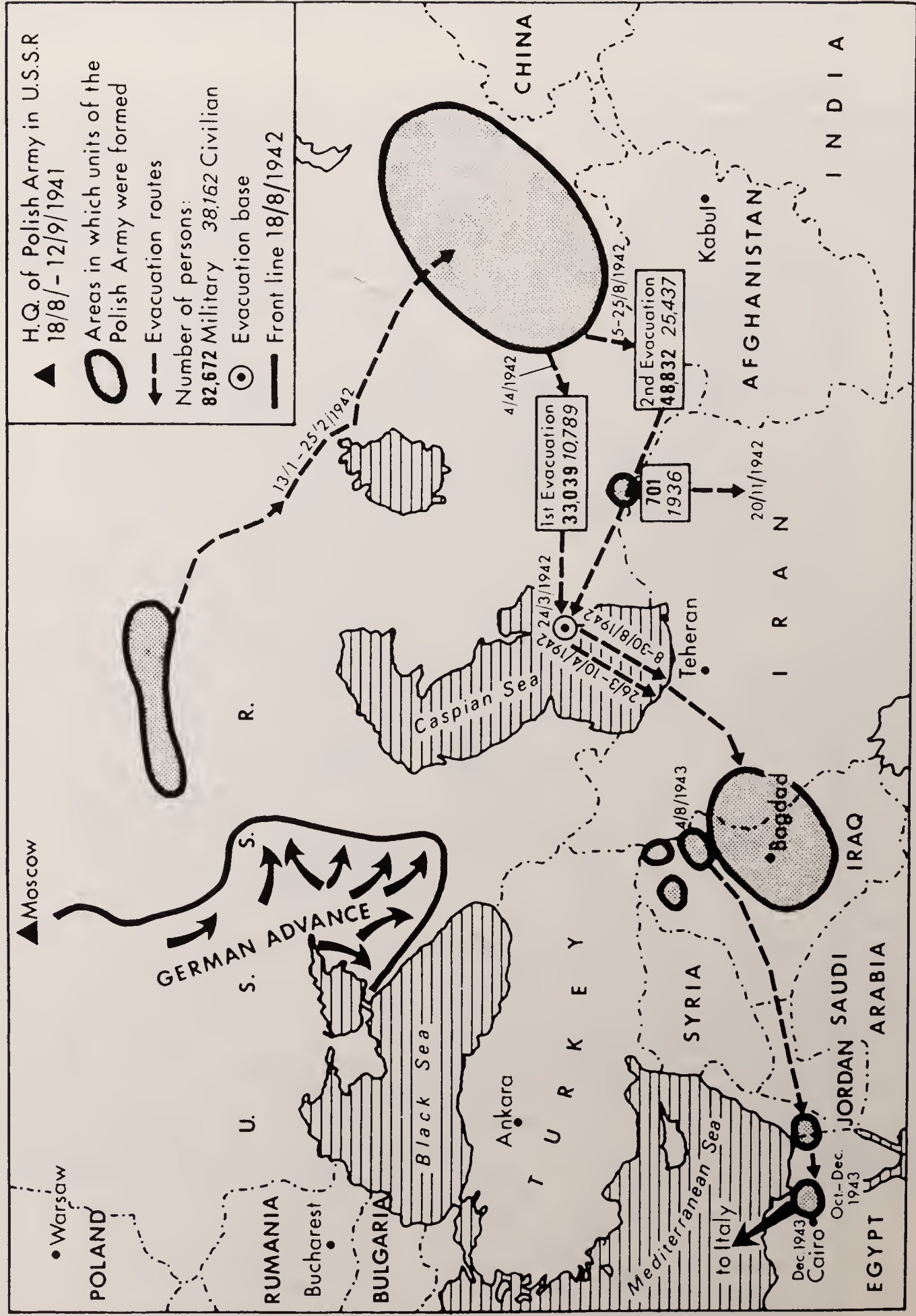
2. MAIN ROUTES TO THE WEST.



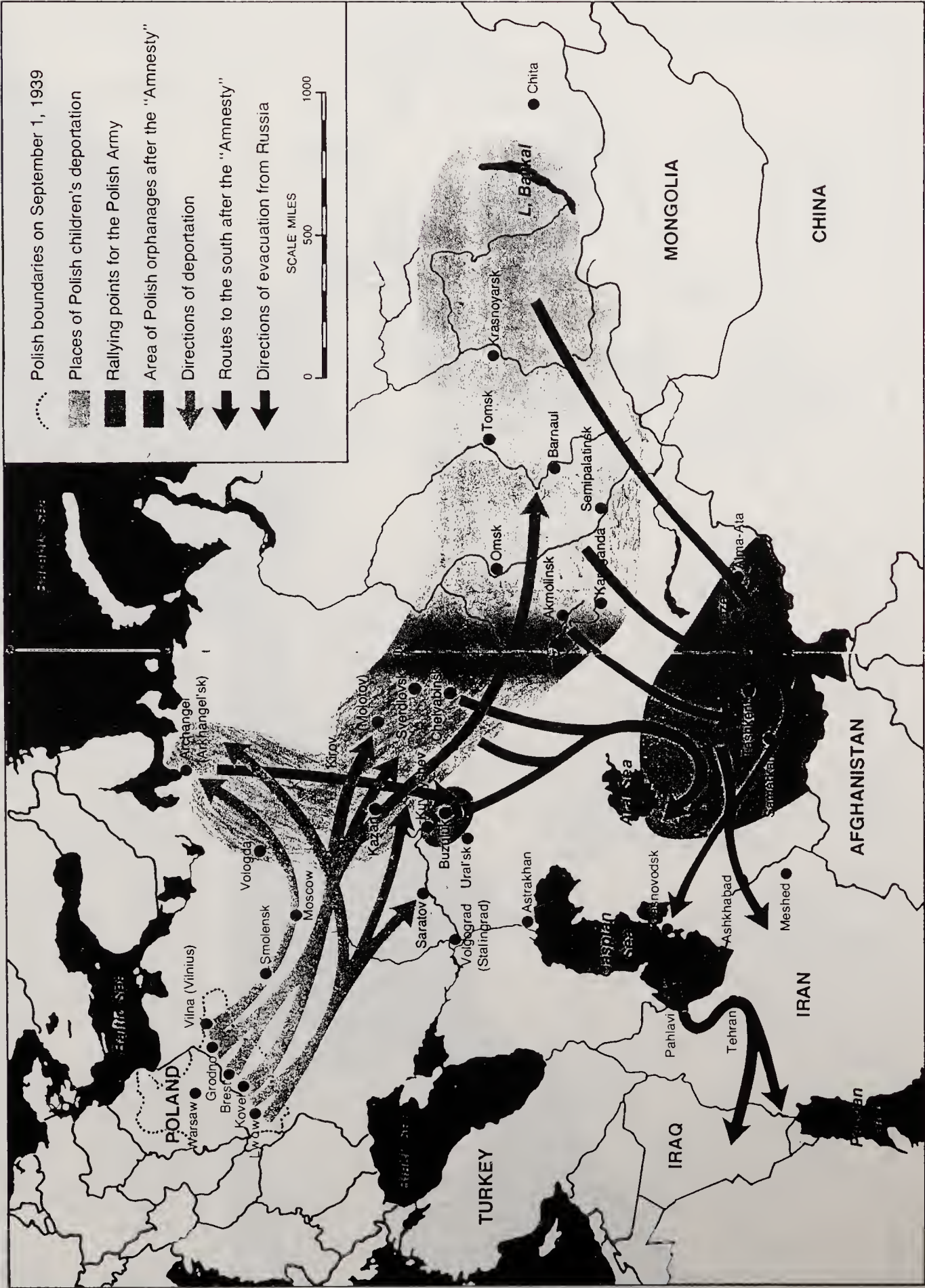
3. DISTRIBUTION OF POLISH UNITS IN THE BRITISH ISLES, 1940-41.



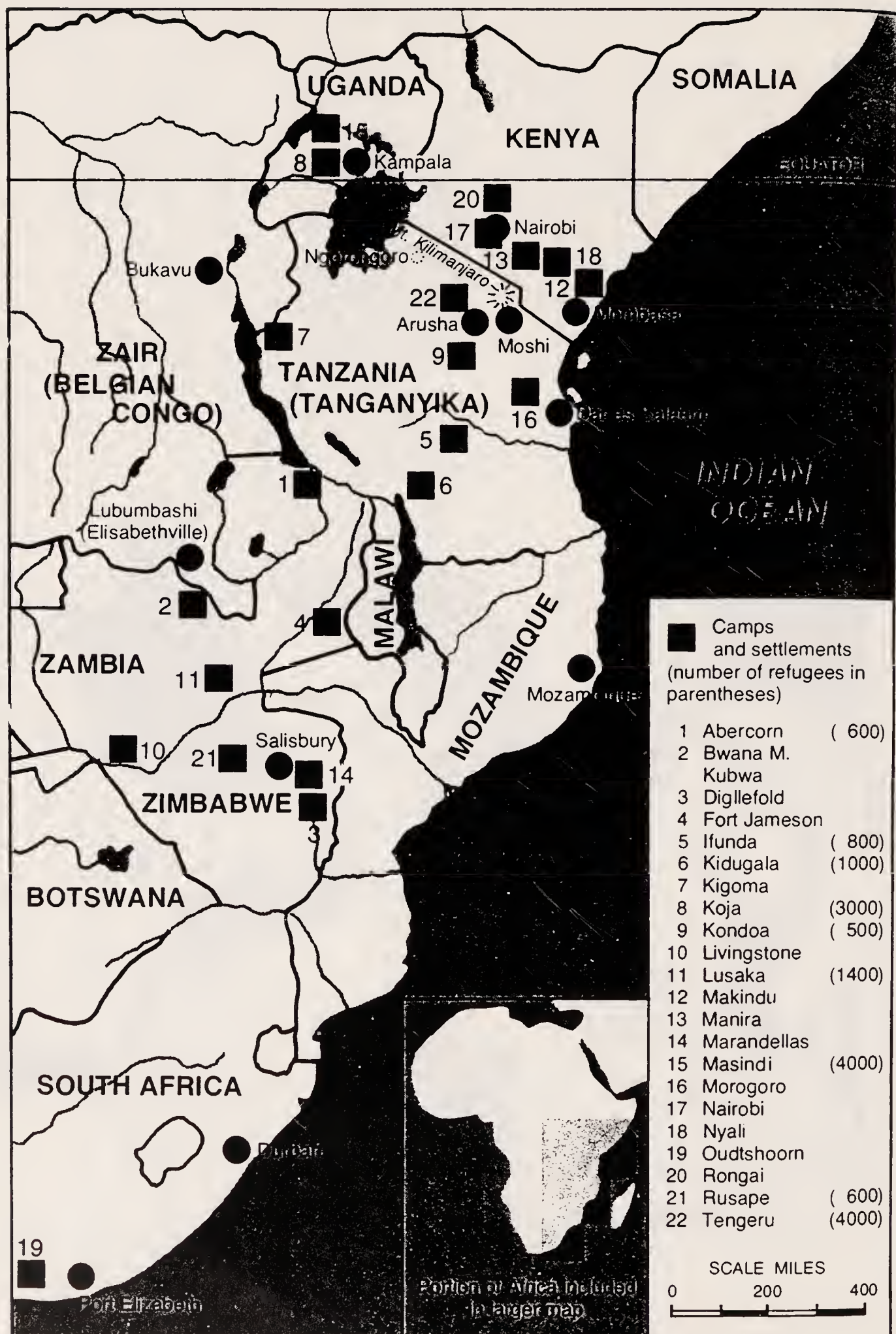
4. THE POLISH ARMY IN THE USSR AND IN THE MIDDLE EAST, 1941-43.



5. PLACES OF POLISH CHILDREN'S DEPORTATION.



6. POLISH REFUGEE CAMPS IN AFRICA, 1942-50.



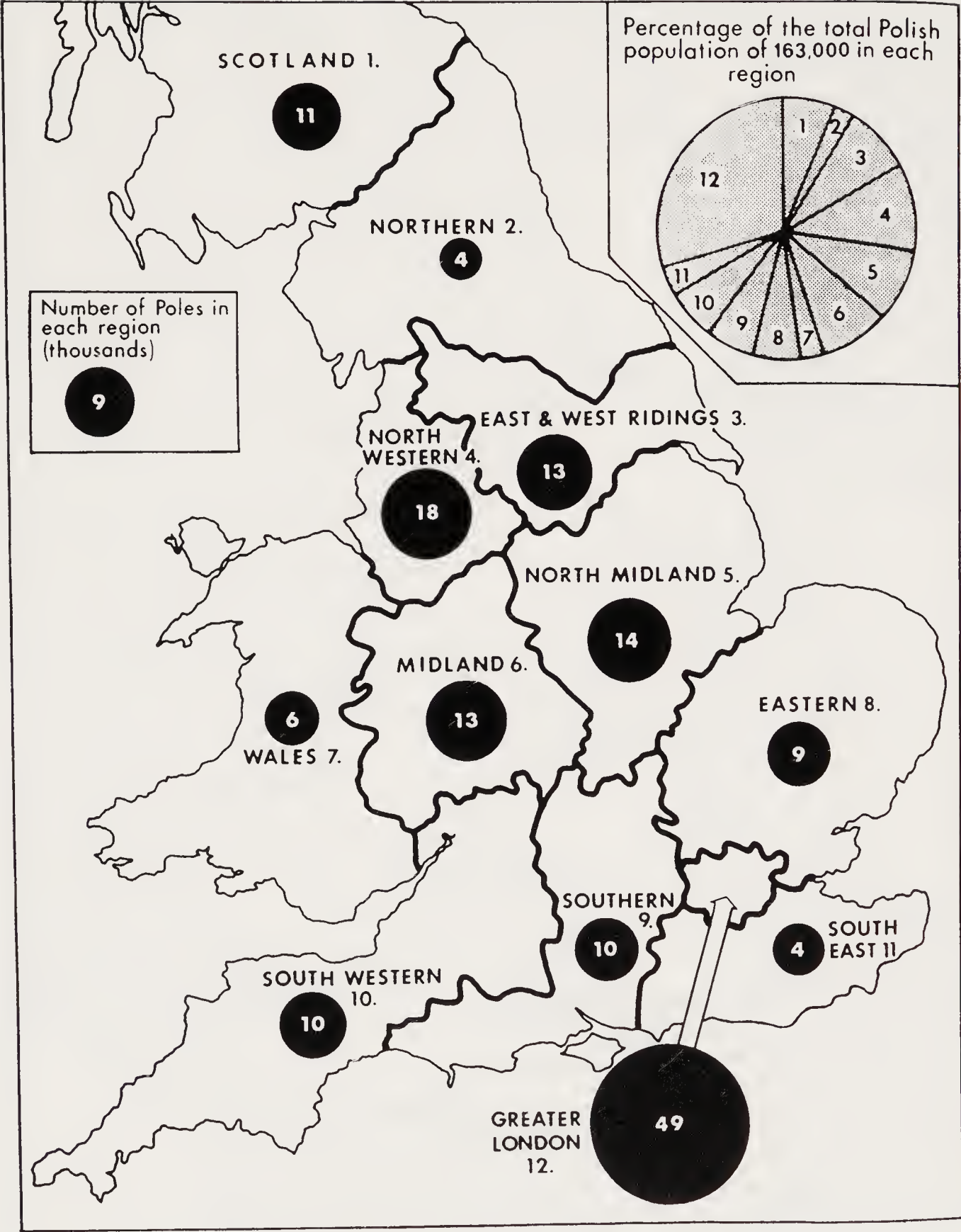
7. MAIN LAND BATTLES IN WHICH POLISH TROOPS IN THE WEST
WERE INVOLVED, 1940-45.



8. MAIN LOCATIONS OF THE POLISH SECOND CORPS IN 1946.



9. NUMBER OF POLES IN BRITAIN IN 1951.



10. LOCATION OF POLISH PRIESTS IN BRITAIN, IN 1950.

